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**WHEN EAST MEETS WEST:
EXPLORING THE ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCES
OF EAST ASIAN ONLINE LEARNERS**

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of the degree of Doctorate in Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how East Asian postgraduate students experience acculturation when engaging in online learning in one UK university. Previous studies have mainly been quantitative, retrospective and conducted in countries such as the United States (for example, Sullivan and Kashubeck-West, 2015). Fewer studies have been qualitative, explored current student experiences and been conducted in the United Kingdom. Ten interviews were conducted (five males and five females who self-identified as East Asian). Participants were living in the United Kingdom, Austria, Saudi Arabia, China, Malaysia and Japan and studying on one of five Master's degree programmes. The interview schedule included questions about the perceived benefits and barriers of online learning and support systems. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using an approach informed by Grounded Theory. Three themes emerged from the data: family values; cultural bumps; sources of motivation. Values such as 'kiasu' transmitted amongst East Asian families to promote winning and high achievement have a lasting impact upon East Asian postgraduates' ability to cope with the demands of online learning. Barriers to online education could be termed 'cultural bumps' for East Asian postgraduates. For instance, students might face difficulties with directing questions to an authority figure and to be critical in academic writing which is particularly important for postgraduate study. Creating hybrid cultural identities, diversifying and decolonising the curriculum could help remove barriers to success. The other main source of motivation, staff, could enable the student to more effectively participate in tutorials and to complete assignments. The study adds to and extends what is known about perceptions of the role of the tutor in online learning, adds a dimension to Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning and is one of the first studies conducted in a UK university to identify kiasuism as an additional pressure for East Asian postgraduates.

Keywords: East Asian students, acculturation, cultural diversity, cultural identities, postgraduate education, online learning, barriers to higher education, coping, motivation.

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GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Keyword	Definition or explanation
Acculturation	Acculturation is widely accepted to refer to the process and strategies employed by people trying to negotiate their heritage group as well as the new wider society (Berry et al., 1990).
Acculturation Framework	An acculturation framework sets out the psychological changes that individuals may go through when trying to navigate a new culture (Berry, 1980).
Acculturative stress	Feelings of anxiety, alienation as well as confusion around cultural identity (Sullivan and Kashubeck-West, 2015)
Assimilation	Assimilation implies that the students did fit in with the new culture but had lost some of their original cultural identity in the process (Berry, 1980).
Brick university	Universities in which teaching is mostly face-to-face.
‘Cultural bumps’	A term that I have created based on the findings which emerged from my data. I use this term throughout to mean the challenges encountered by East Asian postgraduates when they engage with online learning. Put simply, this can include but is not limited to: the pressure to be independent and critical (when there is perceived cultural distance as in East Asian culture, students are encouraged to be interdependent and deferent to authority); confusion around the ‘correct’ written academic style and conventions rather than huge misunderstandings with language; being faced with local references rather than global references when

	learning; increased anxiety regarding contributing posts online and participation in online tutorials; needing more time and space to process. This term is similar but distinct from ‘culture shock’ (below) because these challenges are subtler, less visible but no less important than the challenges experienced by people who physically move.
Cultural identity	Cultural identity is fluid and refers to the culture or cultures where a student feels a sense of belonging or affinity with. Often, multiple cultural identities can be held.
Culture shock	The feeling of disorientation experienced by someone when they are suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture, way of life, or set of attitudes (Oberg, 1960; Zhou et al., 2008)
East Asian students	Students self-identifying as East Asian and who may have cultural links to the following countries, for example: China, Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, Brunei.
Ethnicity	Ethnicity is the state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition. It is a social construction and can and has be used to separate out groups (Aspinall, 2011).
Ethnocentrism	Ethnocentrism is evaluation of other cultures according to preconceptions originating in the standards and customs of one's own culture (Young et al., 2017).
Ethnographic dazzle	Blindness to underlying similarities between human groups (Fox, 1989).
Face-saving	Face-saving refers to the act of preserving a person’s reputation or dignity. It may result in students hiding their feelings through laughter or deflection when

	they perceive that others may be evaluating them in social situations (Thompson and Ku, 2005).
Home students	Used in previous studies (for example, Ward and Chang, 1997) to refer to ‘domestic students’ – students who originate from the country that they are studying in. This is problematic because students can hold mixed cultural heritage or may have moved from place to place. In this research, Western students is used as an alternate phrase but it too is imperfect.
Hybrid cultural identities	Hybrid cultural identities are created as time progresses in a process where cultural elements blend into another culture to fit cultural norms and extend boundaries (Mahendran, 2013).
Identity hyphenation	Identity hyphenation is a term that implies a dual identity. It evokes questions regarding which side of the hyphen the person belongs to, giving the impression that the person is oscillating between two cultures (Fine and Sirin, 2007).
Kiasuism	‘Kiasuism’ often refers to competitiveness and high achievement. In the context of education, ‘kiasu’ may be viewed more favourably as it is a value which encompasses wanting to do well at any cost (Bedford and Chua, 2018). This cultural value also links to national identity and national pride. Its literal translation from Hokkien is ‘afraid of losing out’ or ‘afraid of not getting the best’.
Online learning	A method of studying in which lectures are broadcast or tutorials are conducted by correspondence, without the student needing to attend in person.

'Othering'	'Othering' is a term used in a social science context to mean viewing or treating a group of people as intrinsically different to another group. It is closely related to power relations and can create feelings of superiority and inferiority between groups (Said, 1978).
Status sets	'Status sets' is a term used in sociology to refer to a collection of social statuses that a person holds. For example, my status sets include being a doctoral research student, girlfriend, daughter, sister, lecturer, mentor, British citizen. These roles can revolve and different identities can come to the fore dependent on the situation (Merton, 1972).

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	In full
CAN	Change Agents' Network
DU	Digital University
GT	Grounded Theory
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
ONS	Office for National Statistics
SIT	Social Identity Theory
TL	Transformative Learning

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aim and motivations for the study – The personal, the professional and the academic

The aim of this study was to explore the acculturation experiences of East Asian online learners at The Digital University. This has stemmed from an interest in how perceived cultural distance can help and hinder students. This research project has been shaped by my desire to want to know more about how students cope with transitions when encountering more than one culture. This interest partially has its roots in my own mixed cultural heritage. I was born and brought up in England by an English mother and Singaporean father with an awareness of elements of English and Singaporean-Chinese cultures. I attended English schools and English universities. As such, how cultures can influence life experiences both positively and negatively are of great interest to me. My mixed cultural heritage has deepened my awareness that people can come from mini cultures within larger cultures. For instance, I am Singaporean-Chinese as opposed to Malaysian-Chinese or Han-Chinese (also known as Teochew people). However, I recognise that not all students will share my experiences. Situating myself in the research and making this clear from the outset was important as I am a cultural insider and cultural outsider, sometimes referred to as a 'cultural inbetweenner' (Liamputtong, 2010).

A cultural insider is a person who shares aspects of the same culture as the participants in the research (Banks, 1998). A potential ethical issue of being an insider was that it could be perceived that I already possess intimate knowledge of what it is like to see the world through the participants' eyes. However, I was clear that there are aspects that I do not have first-hand familiarity with. For example, I am not bilingual as I grew up speaking and writing fluent English and cannot speak Mandarin Chinese. However, I am fully aware that students who have learnt English as an additional language may face barriers that I have not. Sharing some aspects of the same culture can be beneficial for building trust and establishing rapport with diverse student populations in research (Ford, 2010). Being a cultural insider helped researchers to be accepted by the group of people being studied because they are seen to have legitimacy (Liamputtong, 2010). By having personal insight, cultural insiders are perceived to hold knowledge of the core social and cultural issues

affecting the group (Liamputtong, 2010). If the researcher is seen to have markedly different values and beliefs from the group being studied, they might be perceived to be a cultural outsider. This could negatively affect the relationship between the interviewer and participants during the research process as the participant might feel the interview is forced or superficial (Banks, 1998). Being a 'cultural inbetween' may have considerably helped me to capture rich and meaningful data as I was able to more easily elicit sensitive information. There are some advantages to sharing cultural heritage such as being recognised as part of a community and being able to see from different perspectives (Suwankhong and Liamputtong, 2015).

This doctoral research was carried out at, what will be referred to throughout this thesis as, The Digital University. The Digital University is a large university in the United Kingdom which provides teaching and support for students across all four nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). The student population consists of predominantly part-time students, 70 per cent are studying while working (The Digital University, 2020). The Digital University has a commitment to provide students with opportunities to gain university-level qualifications wherever they are through supported open learning (The Digital University, 2020). This involves providing students with online study guides, forums, textbooks, online tutorials, electronically submitted assignments and the supervision of an academic tutor who marks their work and provides correspondence tuition (The Digital University, 2020). At the time of undertaking the study, 2,820 international students were enrolled on taught postgraduate degrees for the academic year 2017-2018 (HESA, 2020). Furthermore, when looking at data referring to students on taught postgraduate degrees outside of the EU but engaging through online learning, it is found that 38,550 students were enrolled (HESA, 2020). As there are many postgraduate students who may be bringing different cultural experiences with them to their studies, this provides a clear justification for learning more about what benefits and barriers there are for students studying at this level online.

Personal, academic and professional motivations underpin the selection of The Digital University as the research context. I have personally studied as a postgraduate student and have English-Singaporean heritage therefore the experiences of 'English' and 'postgraduate' students are all of interest to me. Whilst my mixed English-Singaporean heritage has given me one account of how cultural influences can affect a student's

experience, the hope was that this doctoral research would enable me to uncover, discover and disseminate far more stories than my own. I fully recognise that my own experience is just one of many. A detailed discussion of the methodological and ethical considerations including how a person's own biography may positively and negatively shape the research can be found in Chapter 3.

The academic reason for selecting The Digital University is that it is an institution which particularly focusses on encouraging diversity in higher education and providing equal opportunities:

"We celebrate diversity and the strengths that it brings, we challenge under-representation and differences in outcomes. Discrimination arising from individual characteristics and circumstances is not only unlawful, but a waste of talent and a denial of opportunity, preventing individuals, organisations and societies from achieving their growth potential" (The Digital University, 2020).

Outlined within the strategic plans from The Digital University are three key values: inclusivity, innovation and responsiveness. The values set out are ambitious and positive to work towards but only by carrying out research with current students is it possible to put these to the test. Research is needed to explore how under-representation is overcome, how discrimination is prevented, and how participation can be widened for all students with different cultural identities.

The professional reason for selecting The Digital University is that I was employed as an Associate Lecturer directly teaching and supporting students for two years prior to the start of this doctorate and continued to do so throughout. Therefore, the study findings can help me improve my own professional practice. Additionally, it is hoped that this research study has added to and extended educational theory and might aid others' professional practice.

1.2 Challenges for universities in the United Kingdom higher education context

At the time of writing, the number of international students in the United Kingdom, United States, Australian and Canadian universities is rising every year (Choudaha and

Chang, 2012). The UK is second only to the US as the most popular study destination for international students (Universities UK, 2020). Study has overtaken work in terms of the reason that Chinese and Indian migrants are moving to the UK (Ford, 2019). Overall, about 280,000 migrants arrived to study in the UK (ONS, 2019). The number of study visa applications rose to 107,000 up until June 2019. These two figures are suggestive of a growing trend of more migrants wanting to learn and to contribute to UK university life. These figures highlight a need to understand how to help students to transition and integrate.

The UK government has set itself a goal to attract 600,000 international students by 2030 (ICEF, 2019). The former Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds, had alluded to the need to reach out to global partners to attract international students following Brexit (ICEF, 2019). However, the UK faces competition from the Australian government who are hoping to increase their international student population from 500,000 to 720,000 (ICEF, 2019). They are set to push the UK down into third place for the most popular study destination (UCL, 2018). Furthermore, there are fears that Brexit could negatively impact upon the numbers of EU students such as students from Denmark, The Netherlands and Germany who wish to study in the UK (Marginson, 2017; Woodfield, 2018). Instead, the UK government may wish to attract more international (non-EU) students to its universities. In 2016-17, the total number of non-UK students studying in the country was 442,375 accounting for 19 per cent of all students (HESA, 2018a). Of these, 13 per cent were non-EU students (HESA, 2018a). Some ethnic minority groups have increased in numbers more than others. For instance, the number of Chinese students in UK universities has risen by 34 per cent since 2015 from 89,540 students to 120,385 students (HESA, 2018b). More specifically, when focussing upon students studying on postgraduate degree programmes, the largest growing ethnic minority in UK universities is Chinese students (HESA, 2018b).

The UK government is keen to attract international students as explicitly stated in the International Education Strategy published in March 2019 (ICEF, 2019). Within this, the UK government made a number of pledges which align with my own rationale for the current study. These pledges include the need to identify and share good practice in terms of how universities support international students with reference to future

employment and further study (Action 5) (ICEF, 2019, p. 37). The UK government also pledges to invest in the evidence base for *how* universities support international students and to monitor the international students' experiences (ICEF, 2019, p. 13). It is of national importance to study these issues to help attract and keep international students in UK universities. Over and above this, I would argue that the International Education Strategy suggests that there are particular cultures and countries that the UK government wants to collaborate with to achieve its aims. The strategy makes clear that two of the four regions being targeted in particular are East Asian namely 'China and Hong Kong' as well as what it refers to as the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) which includes but is not limited to: Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam (UK Government, 2021). Therefore, this provides more of a justification for focussing upon East Asian students as the UK government has paid particular attention to these regions in their national strategy. In the International Education Strategy, it is clear that two of the five cross-cutting actions mentioned for education explicitly mention international students. First, there is a need for an International Education Champion to create more international opportunities and partnerships. Second, there is a need to continue to provide a welcoming environment for international students (UK Government, 2021).

A broad range of strategies is being used to recruit students from China such as UK universities helping to create universities abroad, be involved in the creation of new degree programmes in China and having study abroad schemes within UK degree programmes. One example is the University of Liverpool where 1 in 5 of their students identify as Chinese and which has partnerships with Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University (University of Liverpool, 2020). Chinese students have the opportunity to come to the UK to study, and UK students can study in Suzhou, China for a year abroad as part of the BA China Studies degree programme (University of Liverpool, 2020).

For all universities, there is a wider challenge about how best to support students holding different or multiple cultural identities and the current study was designed to explore this. Identities may not be fixed or easy to categorise because students blend, negotiate and create their own hybrid cultural identities (Berry, 1990; Mahendran, 2013). The findings of my study could be extrapolated to other universities to help them with the

challenge of the gap in knowledge about how to help these students. This might allow universities to deepen their understanding of the needs of postgraduate students with different cultural identities.

1.3 Challenges for students acculturating physically or online

The 1950s and 1960s saw a rise in the number of research studies dedicated to investigating how student sojourners adapt or cope (Ward et al., 2001). Sojourners is the term used to describe students who move to another country in order to study or work with the intention of returning afterwards (Ward et al., 2001). When the new country is perceived to operate differently to the country the student previously identified with, this could lead to what was traditionally referred to as culture shock (Zhou et al., 2008). This term was first coined by anthropologist Oberg (1960) to describe some of the markers of moving to another culture: strain; the sense of loss; fear of rejection; confusion relating to the blending of values; surprise and anxiety.

Two explanations had been put forward to explain culture shock. The first explanation was related to why people may migrate in the first place, for example, to seek out a better life for themselves. The second was related to the social and psychological changes which might occur for individuals such as a lack of social support or the way they might react to perceived cultural distance (Zhou et al., 2008). By the 1980s, researchers such as Bochner (1982) and Klineberg (1982) were exploring how acculturation could be furthered through effective orientation programmes. This marked a change in research focus from looking at the most severe examples of culture shock to looking at how students could acculturate over the longer term.

The broader issue here is whether online learning has made it better or worse to be in cultural transit. Evidence outlined in more detail in Chapter 2 argues that East Asian students in the UK and the USA may perceive there to be greater cultural gaps in expectations and behaviour when studying (Redmond and Bunyi, 1993). This helps to provide a rationale for research studies, such as my own, which seek to further understand how the experience for these students can be improved and if any 'cultural bumps' can be smoothed out by the students and the staff who support them. It is of

importance to set out here in Chapter 1 precisely what is meant by ‘cultural bumps’ – a term that I have adopted to mean the following. To me, ‘cultural bumps’ are the challenges which East Asian postgraduates reported encountering during their online learning. Traditional ‘culture shock’ is understood to affect students who physically move to study such as settling into new surroundings, dealing with verbal language obstacles and improving their command of English. Instead, ‘cultural bumps’ can include but are not limited to: the pressure to learn quickly at postgraduate level how to be independent and critical; the confusion that can come when local references in teaching rather than global references are used; increased anxiety in relation to contributing online in tutorials or posting on the fora; needing more time to process and reflect. If ‘culture shock’ is more visible, more related to making the geographical move and verbal language, ‘cultural bumps’ are subtler, less visible and refer more to adjusting to Western academic conventions. The good news, despite the number of ‘cultural bumps’ that have been uncovered in this research, is that the participants also reported the remedies. This can include having some prior experience of Western study beforehand; creating hybrid cultural identities to help them psychologically adjust; having a present, active and encouraging tutor; having the opportunity to develop their academic writing and critical thinking skills.

It is important to note that some of these challenges may be systemic. This might include assessment strategies which leave little time or space for reflection or which focus heavily on critical evaluation and questioning. Assessment strategies are usually decided by the institution at a higher level, as opposed to the educators who deliver the curriculum first-hand.

Learning can be transformative; it can change the way students think about themselves and the world around them (Dorsett et al., 2019). Transformative Learning is complex and has been defined as a:

“shift in consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world” (Kovan and Dirkx, 2003, p. 102).

Several authors have cautioned against the misuse of schooling to inform children about specific groups for fear that teachers may perpetuate stereotypes. For example, social

psychologist Tajfel (1970) believed that viewing people as belonging to an 'out-group' could lead to them being dehumanised which could in turn lead to discrimination and conflict.

Culture can be one way in which 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' are formed. However, when different members of groups encounter one another, there can be benefits for both. This has been termed 'intercultural capital' (Pollman, 2013) and refers to learning new languages and benefitting from having intercultural friendships. Students experiencing different cultures through encountering one another may come to realise how similar *and* different they are, rather than only perceiving there to be differences.

Educators and students work within an educational system which outwardly conveys the spirit of the culture (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1967). In schools or other educational settings, local news stories may be used to illustrate a point which perhaps neglects students' different cultural identities. This is an example of 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995). To overcome this, world news examples could be more inclusive and resonate with more students. A distinction between xenophobia and nationalistic language can be made based on intent. Xenophobia is when people fear others from countries different to their own (Andreouli, 2015). Language used when this happens may be used to intentionally provoke or harm (Andreouli, 2015). On the other hand, nationalistic language is not used intentionally to 'other' but is more linked to national identity and pride. Nationalistic language can operate based on taken-for-granted assumptions (Billig, 1995). Language embedded and therefore unnoticed in everyday situations can define regional and national difference (Andreouli, 2015). However, these perceived differences between nations are not naturally occurring but socially engineered by media discourses (Andreouli, 2015). What we read about and hear on the news can shape what we believe and even normalise differences, which is troubling. This framework explaining banal nationalism is useful, but not without its limitations. One limitation is that Billig's (1995) work was focussed upon national media, however, global news can be disseminated easily on the internet so people may view the world as more connected than previously thought. A second limitation is that where people believe 'home' is can transcend geographical boundaries (Andreouli, 2015). They may be able to stay in touch with family and friends at home to keep connected or create multiple national identities (Andreouli, 2015).

Given that this thesis aims to explore students' perceptions of the impact of different cultures upon them and students' perceptions of those who teach and support them, a conscious decision was made to search for and cite literature from a Western perspective as well as from an East Asian perspective. This is because different countries may view internationalisation within universities as beneficial but may employ different strategies to achieve it.

Universities themselves may have different methods to try and internationalise their student community. In brick universities, broadly defined in my study as a university with a physical campus complete with student accommodation, teaching and research facilities and regular face-to-face contact, students may embark upon study abroad programmes. Brick universities may also actively recruit international students, for example, the 2008 plan by the Japanese government to attract 300,000 international students to Japanese universities by 2020 (Ho et al., 2015). In addition, universities may foster collaborations with universities in other countries in terms of teaching and research, by promoting a diverse curriculum as well as encouraging staff to publish in international journals (Ho et al., 2015). These are all examples of ways in which universities portray their commitment to diversity.

Research from East Asian researchers mirrors what has been found by Western researchers. The East Asian perspective of intercultural education concurs that engaging with study abroad programmes can enable personal growth, promote positive attitudes towards other cultures (Knight, 2004) and create a multicultural perspective (He and Chen, 2010). In addition, by exploring new cultures, students' self-esteem and confidence may increase and they may develop new ways of thinking (Sherry et al., 2010). Students may then view themselves as citizens of the world rather than citizens of a specific, geographical area (Gacel-Avila, 2005).

One study by Ho et al. (2015) aimed to explore what the benefits of internationalisation might be in Taiwan and Japan. The authors designed a staff survey and sent this to 50 Professors in Taiwan (of which 42 were completed and returned) and 50 Professors in Japan (of which 47 were completed and returned). The research questions sought to explore the main goals of internationalisation, how these goals would be prioritised, how the universities would reach these goals and which strategies worked best. One key

finding relevant to the current study was that the Japanese government prioritised recruiting international students. Prior to a university opening a programme, it has to ensure that a proportion of international students has been recruited. In addition, wider societal factors have had an impact, such as a decreased birth rate, shrinking university-age population and existence of private universities which do not benefit from funding. These factors have also contributed to Japanese universities' drive to attract students from further afield. The most effective way of enriching students' international knowledge was to diversify the curriculum. Similarly, the most effective way of improving students' foreign language ability was to create an English-friendly campus. There are differences in where academics publish their papers; in domestic journals versus international journals. In Taiwan, there is a greater prioritisation for publishing in international journals because they want to improve the perceived quality of higher education. On the contrary, Japanese academics reported that there is less risk to their academic reputation so they are more inclined to publish in Japanese journals. These findings are an important example of the recognition in both Western and East Asian universities that internationalisation can be made possible in many ways and that there are many benefits of it:

"In both Taiwan and Japan much importance is given to enriching students' international knowledge, creating a multicultural campus, and improving students' foreign language skills" (Ho et al., 2015, p. 63).

Whilst this study does well to illuminate the staff perspective and the multiple ways that internationalisation can be implemented effectively in East Asia, there are some shortcomings. First, it is not clear from the article how the 50 Professors from Taiwan and the 50 Professors from Japan were selected during the recruitment process. It may be that there are differences between academics and depending on how much direct contact they have with students, they may have different views about what is important. Second, this study does not provide any evidence of what the students themselves thought or felt so we cannot assume that the internationalisation strategies have a positive impact. Furthermore, what is also missing is literature which directly addresses issues which affect students holding different cultural identities which may arise from online learning. This is despite the increase in the number of universities seeking to attract international students and wishing to provide online learning.

One question which could be posited here at the end of Chapter 1 is whether the core focus of my study was about 'culture' broadly or 'cultures' as in the specific groups that my participants used to describe where they belonged. For me, whilst my study covers Western culture, East Asian culture and online learning, I argue that any cultural differences have been largely created by people and therefore could be changed and rewritten by people. This is a view welcomed by anthropologists and sociologists too such as Cohen (1985) who posited that cultural boundaries might be created when a group feels that the criteria or properties of their culture might be open to threat. I was conscious of the need to recognise the relationship between culture as well as ethnicity and shared practices (i.e. socially constructed borders) over birthplace or nationality (geographical borders). At the forefront of the study is an interest in the creation of cultural identities and communities and how people themselves might identify as within or outside of these. I have made reference to 'students holding different cultural identities' throughout this thesis and make clear here that the cultural identities are bounded by the students themselves and are only as distinct from one another as they are perceived to be (not a reflection of my own views). This view of culture and cultural identity is supported by authors such as Elder-Vass (2012) and Lehtonen (2011) who highlighted that cultures can be negotiated rather than universally accepted forever as 'fact'.

From gaining a deeper understanding of culture shock and acculturation more broadly, I wanted to narrow my focus to look at the benefits and barriers for students holding different cultural identities and to see if they are enabled or disabled by online learning. I chose to interview students with East Asian cultural identities to help me understand how they made sense of periods of transition such as studying in a different and possibly new culture. More details of the justification of this methodological stance can be found in Chapter 3. Furthermore, as I have similarities and differences with the participants in terms of my own cultural identities and study experiences, I have drawn upon a constructivist approach to Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006). I have applied the data analysis techniques rather than rigidly adopting Grounded Theory.

1.4 Summary

Chapter 1 has provided a rationale for the study and the three main driving motivations for the study have been made clear. First, was the personal motivation. I initially set out to study the process of acculturation as I identify with both English and Singaporean-

Chinese cultures. Second, was the academic motivation. The Digital University was an ideal research context due to my dual interest into how online learning could help or hinder students from different cultural backgrounds. The Digital University is a leader in online learning and its positive mission statement and effectiveness could be tested through interviewing current postgraduate students. Third, was the professional motivation. I have been employed as an Associate Lecturer in a UK university with a focus on online learning and worked with students holding diverse cultural heritages. I have also experienced the university from a taught and research degree student perspective which further piqued my interest and led me to wish to explore postgraduate study participation.

In the wider HE context in the UK, there is a stark gap in the literature for research studies which explore the cultural identities of online learners, particularly at postgraduate level. This is despite the growing numbers of Chinese students in UK universities studying taught postgraduate degrees (HESA, 2020). As more students may bring cultural experiences with them to their studies, there is a need to know how universities can support them and what benefits and barriers to online learning might exist. Culture shock used to be caused by physical migration to another country by sojourners, now it may be that 'cultural bumps' are experienced as more students study online, these are subtler social and psychological changes which come from encountering a new culture but online rather than in person. As defined in my glossary as well as Section 1.3 above, as a reminder, 'cultural bumps' is a term I have adopted to refer to the challenges that East Asian postgraduates reported facing when engaging with online learning. Whilst subtler and perhaps less visible, they are no less important as they can impact upon the perceived ability to participate. Some 'cultural bumps' can be negative but short-term. For example, a cultural bump could be perceiving there to be cultural differences in how they need to present themselves when learning. So, a student could think that they need to be interdependent and convey deference to authority, in line with East Asian cultural practices. However, they may then experience a 'bump' when they realise that they are being encouraged to be independent learners and be critical. They can also experience positives, for example, exchanging intercultural capital and cultural competence. Barriers in higher education settings may exist which come from educators using local examples, nationalistic language or misinterpreting other cultural behaviour as inappropriate. Some

institutions employ strategies such as study abroad programmes or collaborating with other universities abroad to show that they are committed to cultural diversity. East Asian and Western researchers find that institutions recognise the benefits of internationalisation, for example, more confidence, self-esteem, life satisfaction, new perspectives and ways of thinking.

In summary, there is a clear space to investigate: the impact of perceived cultural distance on online learners because of my own personal, professional and academic interests; the emergence of online learning as a way for students from different cultures to be more easily available to one another; the universal goal of universities to help develop open minds and how to better support international and postgraduate communities.

1.5 Thesis structure

In Chapter 2, I consider the literature which helped me to identify gaps in knowledge. Here, I set out the conceptual framework and the search strategy. Following this, studies from the four broad areas: acculturation processes of sojourners, acculturation processes of East Asian postgraduates, parental influence and 'kiasuism' were also included and discussed as relevant to the themes which shaped my study. The broader theories which explain the process of learning and the process of creating identities such as Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning (2000), Berry's (1980) Acculturation Framework and Tajfel and Turner's (2004) Social Identity Theory are also introduced.

In Chapter 3, I begin by setting out my ontological perspective and epistemological views. A justification for the selection of semi-structured interviews as the method and the drawing upon and applying the techniques key to a Grounded Theory approach are also given. Lessons learned from the pilot study and applied to the main study are explained. Lastly, the key methodological and ethical considerations such as insider-outsider issues, role of the researcher and recognition of the importance of reflexivity and power relation issues are detailed.

In Chapter 4, I set out the three themes which arose from the process of data collection and analysis drawing upon a Grounded Theory approach. These were family values, cultural bumps and sources of motivation. The three themes are interconnected and two in particular – family values and cultural bumps – highlight some novel areas which have not been explored in depth with online learners. The themes are highlighted with illustrative comments from across the interviews.

Chapter 5 begins by showing how the findings are connected to the previous literature. The findings are framed in the context of the overarching research questions to ensure that they have been fully addressed. In this chapter, I outline how my own research study (and previous studies) have identified the factors that shape East Asian postgraduates' decisions to engage in online learning. I also outline the ways in which an East Asian cultural identity present benefits or barriers to online learners according to my study (and previous studies). I also outline the sources of motivation and effective support for East Asian postgraduate online learners as highlighted by my own research studies (and previous studies). Lastly, I show the way in which my study has the potential to contribute to educational theory and more specifically, to add a dimension to Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory and add to how we as educators can help students holding different cultural identities navigate 'cultural bumps'.

Chapter 6 follows on from the focus on theory in Chapter 5 and shifts the focus to how my own research study contributes to professional practice. Whilst I make no claim to have reinvented any wheels, I do believe that my own views of how students holding different cultural identities can be better supported have been altered forever. My hope is that others will have fewer 'disorienting dilemmas' as a result of any practice that is informed by studies such as my own. In addition to the professional practice reflections, I also reflect on my own methodology, on the limitations of the current study and make recommendations for future research. Lastly, I make a final reflection about the wider lessons learned from carrying out this doctoral research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Culture is a complex and contentious term that can unite and can divide people. In this literature review, I introduce the two main views of culture used in social sciences: essentialist views and non-essentialist views. Two main theoretical concepts namely 'Acculturation' and 'Transformative Learning' were a starting point to help shape the search strategy employed to source literature. I also discuss studies from the early acculturation literature which was focussed on the experiences of sojourners – often students who would move abroad to study before returning 'home'. Then, I discuss the next round of literature which I explored to reflect the evolving needs of students who no longer physically move but who study from 'home'. For this round of literature, I was particularly interested in the experiences of East Asian postgraduates studying online and how perceived cultural distance might impact them positively or negatively. Within these sections where acculturation is the central topic, I have critically examined Tajfel and Turner's (2004) Social Identity Theory as well as Berry's (1980) Acculturation Framework, both key to understanding how in-groups, out-groups and cultural identities are socially constructed. Within the section where Transformative Learning is the central topic, I have critically examined Mezirow's (2001) Theory of Transformative Learning and juxtaposed his ideas with competing views put forward by Dirkx (2000) and Cranton and Roy (2003). As is good practice in studies drawing upon the techniques of a Grounded Theory approach, some of the literature was sourced after data collection, not only before (2006) due to the emergent nature of findings. This meant that when new findings emerged such as parental influence in higher education choices as well as a specific cultural value, kiasuism as an added pressure for East Asian postgraduates, this prompted me to revisit the literature. Finally, an overview of the gaps in knowledge left to be explored is provided and the chapter closes with a statement of the overarching research question and four research sub-questions.

2.2 Search strategy

To reflect the focus on identity and the adoption of a social psychological lens, the following search terms were used to initially identify the most relevant literature to allow the research questions to emerge from these. The search terms were: 'acculturation', 'acculturative stress', 'adaptation', 'adjustment', 'cross-cultural transitions', 'cultural competence', 'culture shock', 'East Asian students', 'identity shifts', 'international students', 'postgraduate students', 'sociocultural adaptation', 'social support'. No restriction on years was employed when searching for theoretical background but when searching for empirical studies, this was limited to the past twenty years (2000-2020). The following peer-reviewed journals and similar were consulted: Educational Media International, Evaluation and Research in Education, International Journal of Intercultural Relations, Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, Journal of Distance Education, Journal of International Students, Studies in Higher Education. Articles which were focussed on student attainment rather than the student experience were excluded. My research was more focussed upon improving student participation and satisfaction, rather than improving test scores.

In line with a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach (see Section 3.7 for a more in-depth explanation), once the findings from my own study became clear, further literature was gathered. Examples of search terms were: 'Chinese parents', 'East Asian parents', 'parental influence', 'degree choices', 'higher education', 'high achievement'. The search parameters were initially set to include literature published since 2018 to locate the most current research being published in this area. Journal articles which were quantitative in nature or which focussed upon primary or secondary school children as opposed to university or graduate students were excluded. In addition, journal articles which erroneously included parental influence over arranged marriages and perceptions of entering into careers such as medicine were excluded.

Also, the following search strategy was employed once findings emerged relating to culture-specific values. The search terms were 'kiasu', 'East Asian values', 'postgraduates', 'higher education', 'distance learning'. The search parameters were set to include literature published since 2018 to locate the most current research being published. However, due to so few studies being published in this area, this was at first widened to include studies from 2015, then again widened to 2010 and finally widened to 'any time'.

Journal articles which erroneously included unpublished doctoral dissertations on the subject were excluded, as they are not usually considered to be a credible source. It is wiser to draw upon peer-reviewed journal articles which have been through a more rigorous process. I broadened my literature search from Google Scholar and the university library databases to include large education databases. Three were helpful, namely 'SAGE', 'ERIC' and the 'British Education index'. I used the following search terms: 'kiasu', 'qualitative', 'social norms' and 'university students' and set this to 'published any time'.

In summary, this section provides evidence of the search terms, parameters used and inclusion/exclusion criteria for sourcing the literature. Next, the first set of literature relating to the acculturation processes of sojourners is discussed.

2.3 Acculturation processes of sojourners

What is meant by culture?

It is argued that culture can be a strong determinant on the way in which individuals live, think and behave and on the quality of life that is achieved (Sen, 2008). Too often, cultural stereotypes can prevail because of a narrow understanding of a particular culture, for instance, when a racist joke is shared or when people discuss the news regarding a particular ethnic minority. The culture we are born into can influence our identity and how we view ourselves as part of a broader group (Sen, 2008). However, it is important to note that cultural identities are not the only significant component of identity; others such as our gender identity also can interact with these (Sen, 2008). In addition, within one culture or umbrella of cultures who share similarities, there can still be much variation. Philosophers such as Sen (2008), psychologists such as Hofstede (2001) and Berry (1980), and educators would agree that increasing knowledge and understanding of different cultures can reduce conflicts. These conflicts can be external (between countries) and internal (within an individual).

There is no single universal definition of culture and there is considerable debate as to whether it is practicable to carry out research in this area without defining it. For example, one definition put forward by social psychologist Hofstede is:

“the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (Hofstede, 1984, p. 21)

A strength of this definition is that it captures that people who identify with one culture might share cultural traits. I would argue that they can also share the cultural traits of other cultures and belong to more than one culture. However, Hofstede’s (1984) definition is not perfect as it does not specify how this mindset is produced. It also implies that cultures separate people from one another whereas they can be used to draw out similarities between cultures. As Hofstede himself admitted:

“This is not a complete definition... but it covers what I have been able to measure” (Hofstede, 1984, p.21)

Several of the definitions available in the literature are incompatible and problematic (Jahoda, 2012). The problems with some of the earlier definitions include not allowing for the idea that cultures can change, that they are not fixed and instead appear to purport that behaviours associated with certain cultures will continue generation after generation. One example of a definition which lacks this flexibility is:

“...members of new generations adopt these recurring patterns of behaviour that mark people as well-socialised individuals...the recurring pattern of behaviour is culture” (Brislin, 1990, p.10)

Two definitions similar to Brislin’s (1990) definition above have been included more recently by Hong (2009) and Oyserman et al. (2009). They bear similarities because they all refer to:

“interconnected individuals who are often demarcated by race, ethnicity or nationality” (Hong, 2009, p.40) and

“patterned beliefs, attitudes and mindsets that go together in loosely defined networks” (Oyserman et al., 2009).

In other words, the definitions are similar because they refer to spotting trends within people. However, they are both limited in not explaining *where* these trends come from or the *ways* in which they are transmitted.

A different take on defining culture which is more flexible than the above definition has been offered by other authors. They instead contend that culture is not internal or ‘in the mind’ as Hofstede (1984) suggested. Culture has been defined as:

“Culture is outside the individual. It is not located in the minds and actions of individual people. Rather, it refers to the press to which individuals are exposed by virtue of living in a particular social system”. (Knafo et al., 2009, p. 128)

This is more aligned with the view that culture may be external, societally constructed and what people become socialised into. Knafo et al. (2009)’s definition implies that there are artefacts which exist in the world which may teach us about a culture. A primary artefact refers to a physical object whilst a secondary artefact refers to norms, beliefs and conventions (Cole and Parker, 2011). Secondary artefacts can include cultural values. However, this definition is limited because it is not clear-cut (Jahoda, 2012). If a ritual is considered to be a primary artefact, it is not clear what its representation might be as a secondary artefact. Culture can consist of objective and subjective elements:

“Objective elements of culture are the tangible objects of culture (architecture, food, manufactured products, whereas subjective culture comprises such human elements such as social, economic, political, religious, practices”. (Keith, 2011, p. 3)

Lastly, the following definition is the most aligned with the view of culture that has emerged from the literature:

“When people in a culture agree on what symbolic elements are important to the culture, these elements become the core elements of the culture”. (Wan and Chiu, 2009, p. 80)

This is an unusual definition because it highlights that what is important within a person’s culture is largely chosen by them and is consensual between people sharing that culture (Jahoda, 2012). This definition is the one which encapsulates the definition that I have used in my research study. In summary, a culture consists of elements which are both internal and external but most importantly, are not given or ascribed to the people within it. Instead, they are decided by the people and can be empowering traits to be transmitted.

The two main views of culture within the social sciences are the essentialist and non-essentialist views of culture. Hofstede (1991) was a proponent of the essentialist view and contends that cultures have characteristics which differentiate cultures and could be considered physical entities. Holliday (1999) challenges this notion and takes the non-essentialist view. He contends that a culture is constantly redefined by both others who try to label a culture and by the groups themselves who can change the meanings of what

a culture might represent. Therefore, a culture, much like cultural identity, is a flexible concept referred to as:

“device rather than fact” (Holliday, 1999, p. 39)

Culture can be used to suit the purposes of identity. For people who hold essentialist views, an oversimplistic idea might be that people identifying with an individualistic culture such as English culture have been characterised as focussing on personal satisfaction (Thompson and Ku, 2005). On the other hand, people identifying with collectivist cultures such as Chinese culture have been portrayed as being motivated by their place within their family, the avoidance of shame and face-saving (Thompson and Ku, 2005). In the current study, a non-essentialist view which appreciates the complexity of a person, rather than focussing on an artificial culture or hard dichotomies, has been taken in the choice of literature (Holliday, Hyde and Kullman, 2004). It is too reductionist to suggest that individualistic and collectivist cultures exist as it does not account well for within-culture differences that exist. In summary, I have adopted a non-essentialist view because culture can be used as a device to bind and separate groups of people and I wanted to acknowledge the complexity of a person.

Defining what is meant by culture is no easy task; this is especially true given the rate at which a culture can evolve over time. The process of trying to define culture has been described as:

“...the hopeless form of trying to moor the cultural anchor on a rapidly moving boat”. (Sen, 2008, p. 55).

Furthermore, the aim of many countries is to be considered open and multicultural. This adds to the confusion about whether individual cultures can be recognised within a community or whether they should be recognised at all. Sen (2008) has written about two key terms which can be at odds with one another when thinking about culture and how to reduce conflicts. The first is the need for cultural liberty which is the freedom to choose whether we want to maintain or change after either receiving new information or reflecting following an experience. The second is the need for cultural conservatism. This is the argument for a particular group to be ‘allowed’ to maintain a lifestyle despite a move. For instance, if a new immigrant group moved to a Western country and wanted to uphold traditions from home.

How diversity is achieved and how it is sustained is more important than simply encouraging more people to feel welcome in new cultures (Sen, 2008). There is a consensus that diversity cannot come at the cost of a minority group feeling marginalised from a perceived majority group. For instance, many organisations have attempted to address the need to manage cultural differences between employees and recognise that failure to do so can result in lower employee well-being and higher incidences of interpersonal conflict (Joshi and Roh, 2009; Shore et al., 2009). However, dealing with cultural diversity is complex and controversial for organisations. Managers may not want to be seen to be giving preference to the minority group or alienating the majority group if this group finds it difficult to accept diversity strategies (Plaut et al., 2011). Diversity cannot also be considered to be a success if minority groups feel limited in their lifestyles; people should be encouraged to be themselves (Lirio et al., 2008; Otten and Jansen, 2014). In my view, this may be a universal tension as it is a tricky balance to strike between inclusion and the longing for belonging versus the freedom to be authentic and true to a person's roots. People may not perceive themselves to be truly included if they do not have the freedom to decide what aspects of a culture they wish to hold onto and which aspects of a new culture they wish to adopt (Jansen et al., 2014; Leonardelli et al., 2010).

The idea that not all people have the freedom to choose how to create and renegotiate how they view their culture(s) is not new but it is problematic. The increasing popularity and use of online learning to reach a more diverse group of students shows that it is a growing issue; one which may have its roots in unequal power relations stemming from coloniality more broadly. Coloniality has been defined as ways of thinking, feeling and is often associated with European ideas which have been transmitted through globalisation (Mignolo, 2011). I suggest that it is not just at the student-tutor level where differences in cultural values could be found but may extend further than this. There may also be macro issues linked to Western values being more dominant and influential in American and British universities and their online learning programmes. These Western values might be referred to as 'hegemonic practice'. This refers to when a set of ideologies or beliefs might be not spoken about but are accepted as the norm, go relatively unchallenged and are often viewed as superior to other ways of thinking which are central to other cultures. It could be argued that Western hegemonic practices lead to cultural imperialism not in

the most obvious sense but in the subtler, unsaid form of coloniality: 'our way is the accepted, right and normative way'. The result of dominant ideas is that anyone's beliefs or practices which are seen to deviate or differentiate themselves could be 'othered' and be viewed as societal immaturity (Adams et al., 2018). In the higher education context, it would not be helpful to view students holding different cultural identities as atypical and 'against the norm' as this could result in misinterpretations of behaviours, language and incorrect labelling. Instead, a more progressive view is called for – one which does not punish students who seemingly go against the grain when driven by their cultural values but which accepts and seeks to understand.

One example of a hegemonic practice could be how the self is constructed by practitioners as well as policymakers. A dichotomy of the constructions of self was put forward by Markus and Kitayama (1991). In their work, they distinguished between the independent and the interdependent constructions of self as a broad framework of ideas or forms of knowledge that might be transmitted between specific cultures. They compared forms of knowledge transmitted in American and Japanese cultures. An independent self is encouraged in Western cultures where the person is thought of as being free to do what they want, to look for how they can personally grow and move forward, to be in control. An interdependent self is more likely to be encouraged in East Asian cultures where the person is thought of as not seeking personal gain or control but instead striving to fit in and adjust where needed by the setting, to reason with others in mind and to be cautious in their interpersonal relations and to fulfil all social obligations (Adams et al., 2015). Therefore, East Asian students who might be influenced to present and construct a seemingly 'subordinate' sense of self in a Western online learning context might be met with unease or confusion and be encouraged to be more in line with individualistic, independent tendencies that are favoured due to dominant Western values. Based on their framework, it may be that not only East Asian online learners are affected by this issue but such tendencies could extend to other cultures where interdependent selves are encouraged e.g. in Latin America.

It is acknowledged that macro issues which relate to coloniality might disadvantage students holding different cultural identities and could adversely impact upon their ability to choose what constitutes their 'culture'. Instead, cultures might be written about and defined by the people who view them from the outside, by the people who are holding

the power. For practitioners and policymakers, this could be countered and actively changed by decolonising curricula so that different ways of thinking are not rejected but instead are sensitively considered. Only by seeing differing examples or versions of knowledge can this happen for both practitioners and those whom they teach to eradicate feelings of deviancy.

In summary, from analysing what texts say about culture, it is clear that only by understanding cultures can conflicts between and within individuals be reduced. Wan and Chiu's (2009) definition has been the most helpful to me. This definition highlights that the important facets of culture to a person are largely chosen by them and are consensual between people sharing that culture. From assessing the different viewpoints, I also decided that the non-essentialist view of culture as adopted by Holliday et al. (2004) was to be taken. This is because this acknowledges that culture is a flexible concept and recognises the complexity of people. The above discussion of culture gives us clues about how cultures are understood, but it does not fully explore how cultural factors might impact upon students' experiences of education. Defining a culture does not tell us *how* mindsets are produced, *how* cultural identities are formed, *where* they come from or *how* they are transmitted. The theoretical background to culture has been presented and the next section details the practical application, how East Asian students fare in education settings.

East Asian students have reported a focus on high achievement and greater fears about failing compared with their Western counterparts (Chen et al., 1995). In other studies, East Asian students also highlight that they may be unintentionally literal with their language leading to difficulties understanding sarcasm, irony and jokes (Zhao and McDougall, 2008). 'Face-saving' can be common and involves students hiding their feelings when they perceive that others may be evaluating them in social situations (Shih and Cifuentes, 2003). The concept of 'face-saving' can be likened to 'dramaturgy', a theatrical metaphor. This means that people feel social situations may not simply be for pleasure but instead are forms of performance, where impressions are important (Goffman, 1959). When studying in Western education, East Asian students have reported preferring to opt for individual projects because it allows them time to organise their thoughts; something which is not always afforded by working within a group project (Ku and Lohr, 2003). When in groups, East Asian students may avoid conflict to maintain

harmony, another important instilled cultural value (Beamer and Varner, 2001). Many studies suggest that East Asian students may find sociocultural adaptation difficult which can lead to *“high levels of stress, neuroticism and perceived cultural distance”* (Forbush and Foucault-Welles, 2016, p. 1; Hazen and Alberts, 2006).

It has been suggested that online learning may be a good fit for East Asian students who are reflective, intuitive and a significant number may actually prefer autonomous learning (Subramaniam, 2008). Online learning is helpful as it allows for more space to process. However, it is unclear whether online learning environments can also hinder, especially if East Asian students report still wanting to achieve highly, have a high fear of failure but are more socially isolated. There is a gap in understanding the ways in which East Asian students engage with an online learning environment. Research between 1950-1990 was generated in a time pre-dating the internet, social media and online learning, however, this does not mean it is not relevant. It is pertinent to understand the ways in which acculturation has been studied by researchers previously as is detailed in the next section.

What is meant by sociocultural adjustment and acculturation?

One of the first models of sociocultural adjustment was presented by sociologist Lysgaard (1955). The notion of sociocultural adjustment refers to the strategies employed or behaviours exhibited during the process of people negotiating their heritage group as well as the new wider society (Ward and Kennedy, 1994). Sociocultural adjustment involves a person trying to fit in and is most associated with outcomes such as having a higher language proficiency (Ward and Geeraert, 2016; Ward and Kennedy, 1996).

Lysgaard's (1955) model, sometimes referred to as the U-curve or the cross-cultural adjustment theory, describes four stages of sociocultural adjustment: the honeymoon period; crisis; adjustment and adaptation; mastery. The honeymoon period is when the student is focussed on the positives of embarking upon the new adventure in a new country (Lysgaard, 1955). Crisis is when culture shock, in its traditional sense, is experienced (Furnham, 2002). It can be defined as:

“an unpleasant and unexpected realisation of the extent of differences between cultures, leading to an unsettling re-evaluation of one's own culture” (Wu and Hammond, 2011, p. 425).

Culture shock can occur when students are not aware of implicit social rules in a new country (Chapdelaine and Alexitch, 2004). Crisis is where perceived cultural distance is the most prominent; the student may feel lonely, lost and confused (Lysgaard, 1955). However, a criticism that can be made of this stage of this early model is that it is unclear how long these negative effects could last. Additionally, there is no mention of whether any positive effects are experienced alongside the negative effects. The adjustment and adaptation stage is when the student may have an improved experience by modifying their behaviour to suit the new situation. The final stage, mastery, is when a student would have fully transitioned, possibly even taking on additional cultural identities.

A strength of Lysgaard's (1955) model is that the stages are clear and that it still resonates 65 years from its inception. It has been used as a foundation for other studies, such as work conducted by Ahmad et al. (2017) with Afghan students studying in three Malaysian universities. Ahmad et al. (2017) sought to better understand how students acculturate to studying within a different culture. They wanted to see if the stages that the Afghan students went through were the same as the stages shown in Lysgaard's (1955) model. A total of 14 undergraduate and postgraduate students (11 male; 3 female), aged 19 - 33 years engaged in three separate focus group discussions. The findings were that the students went through the honeymoon period and crisis stages. Initially, they were warmly welcomed by the respective universities and experienced periods of homesickness. Over time, they developed a more positive view of their Malaysian counterparts and became more aware of how similar Afghan and Malaysian students were, rather than focussing on what set them apart from one another. This shows that Lysgaard's (1955) model is a useful starting point but that some factors can affect how the stages are experienced. For instance, how similar or different the cultures are, how welcoming the university is, as well as how other students behave towards students from different cultures.

Lysgaard's (1955) model is not without its limitations. Firstly, the first and fourth stages, namely the honeymoon period and mastery, are problematic. It is a broad generalisation to make that a student's university journey may always begin with a romanticised view of the new university (Ward et al., 1998). For instance, the student brings with them a wealth of earlier experiences that they can draw upon and they may have a fuller picture of what to expect. In addition, full mastery may not be achievable, it may be unrealistic to

work towards (Ward et al., 1998). A second, related issue is that Lysgaard's (1955) model does not account for what happens when a student is introduced to a university online. It is unclear whether online ways of settling in new students might aid a honeymoon period as the student has time, space and a sense of detachment from the university. On the other hand, it may be the case that these strategies to help with transitions might hinder students' chances of successfully negotiating culture shock. A third issue is that it remains unclear whether Lysgaard's (1955) stages of crisis and adjustment and adaptation are stages which all students progress through and if so, how adjustment in particular might be characterised (Bochner et al., 1977). When students are experiencing stress when settling in, this may be the prime time for dropout or withdrawal from a particular degree programme. This suggests it is imperative to focus on the factors which might help keep a student holding different cultural identities in their degree programme. It would be useful to ask them about the benefits, barriers and support mechanisms which help them to sustain their studies. Some authors have also criticised Lysgaard's (1955) model for being over-simplistic and for failing to account for the ways in which culture shock phenomenon might manifest to varying degrees in students (Church, 1982). Not all authors found evidence to support Lysgaard's (1955) work, including a large-scale international study of foreign students in 11 countries by Klineberg and Hull (1979). They had broken down the length of staying in the new country and used different variables such as problems reported and homesickness, but found almost no connections between these variables.

An alternative take on these issues has been offered more recently by Busher et al. (2016). Their research contested the often reported finding that East Asian students have negative study experiences when moving to a new country. In this study, 20 full-time international postgraduate students attending a UK university participated in individual 30-minute semi-structured interviews. 15 of these were East Asian (14 were from mainland China, one student was from Japan). Prior to this, participants were asked to draw two concept maps depicting visually how they felt about living and studying at the university. These concept maps were useful in triggering answers to the interview questions. Moreover, they were helpful in their own right for the students to understand their own constructions of being students living in a different country. Ten main interview questions were asked about students' previous experiences of higher education and how they might differ now; why they chose the city/university, practices they welcomed

encountered at the university; any barriers to learning that they might encounter; the support they receive and any advice that they might give to prospective students. The interview data and concept maps were both analysed using a Grounded Theory approach.

The main findings of Busher et al.'s (2016) study were that they were initially shocked by living and working in the UK. Some of the initial shock was due to the academic nature, some of it was explicitly connected to living in an unfamiliar place. Therefore, this study still leaves questions such as 'What about students who solely have to deal with encountering a culture but without living in an unfamiliar place?' unanswered and to be examined further. More specifically, it is not known whether online learning might increase or decrease perceived cultural distance. The students were determined to be successful and were driven to overcome challenges. Language was a challenge in both their academic and social lives in line with previous research (Mulligan and Kirkpatrick, 2000; Zhang and Mi, 2010). Another finding was that at the start of their degrees and at the start of being a sojourner, the students found it hard to understand written and oral work so may have been perceived as the 'stereotypical, passive, East Asian student'. Another finding regarding unfamiliar elements of the new culture was that some processes such as the stressed importance of independent learning and working in groups were new. It was not always apparent how best to respond in these situations, therefore they were very appreciative of tutors who offered help in this way. There was evidence of the students building relationships with students who shared their first language as well as UK students. At first, the students reported feeling isolated and lonely but through their social support networks and greater familiarisation, these feelings reduced as they were clearer on social mores.

In summary, Busher et al.'s (2016) study suggests that East Asian students' experiences of culture shock can happen but that they may be short-lived when tutors, other students and extra-curricular activities buffer against this. Long-term student experience may be more positive than Lysgaard's (1955) model suggested. Lysgaard's (1955) original model does not account well for describing the benefits of blending parts of a new culture with elements of an existing culture. Studies which question whether there are positive experiences of moving to a new culture are lacking. However, Busher et al.'s (2016) study is not without its own limitations. Not all of the students were on the same degree programme. Differences resulting from the nature of the individual degree programmes

could have influenced how satisfied they were with their overall experiences. Students in Busher et al.'s (2016) study were particularly receptive to staff support and from their social networks. However, a criticism of this study is that questions about *how* to foster a determination to succeed and help students holding different cultural identities remain. The study does not tell us what students might not find motivating or what tutors could be perceived as doing which could constitute a barrier. Tutors can be powerful gatekeepers after all but students may be unclear how best to utilise them (Bourdieu et al., 1994).

In summary, Lysgaard's (1955) work revealed that the process of acculturation may consist of four stages: the honeymoon period, crisis, adjustment and adaptation as well as mastery. Other authors such as Ahmad et al. (2017) and Busher et al. (2016) have found some evidence that these stages exist but there are criticisms such as how long the crisis and adjustment stages might last for, experienced by students as culture shock.

Lysgaard's (1955) oversimplistic view focussed on the negative outcomes whereas there may be a whole host of positives for students such as gaining an increased knowledge of how to tap into tutor support. The work of Lysgaard (1955) and Busher et al. (2016) are examples which highlight the complex connection between cultural differences and East Asian students' experiences of higher education. They also highlight the gap in the literature for researchers to find out more about the experiences of other students with multiple cultural identities. However, in particular, there is a gap in the literature which relates to the acculturation processes of East Asian postgraduates studying *online*, as is considered in Section 2.4 next.

2.4 Acculturation processes of East Asian postgraduates studying online

As alluded to in Section 2.3 above, there is a distinct gap in the literature for studies which focus on the study experiences of East Asian postgraduates and more specifically, studies which focus on what happens when East Asian postgraduates have chosen to study online. A number of central themes arose from gathering information from this small pool of studies.

Zhao and McDougall (2008) carried out face-to-face interviews with six female East Asian postgraduates studying Education on either a Master's degree or doctoral research programme at a Canadian university. No more specific information about exactly which participants were on which programme was given as it could be used to easily identify them. All of the students had not previously studied in a Western university for more than a year prior and had no online learning experience. The interviews lasted 30 minutes, were conducted in Mandarin and based around 10 open-ended questions. These questions asked the students about cultural factors that affected: their online learning, their comfort with learning, their English ability, their ability to post online for their course, how they could work with others and their preferences for writing or reading notes. The data was analysed using a Grounded Theory approach which revealed three themes: 'Chinese students' perceptions of online learning', 'Participation in online learning' and 'Cultural factors which affected online learning'. Their findings were that East Asian postgraduates held positive attitudes towards online learning. They found it beneficial especially when they were aiming for higher grades. The participants also felt that language barriers were reduced by online learning experiences but one barrier which remained was seeing educators as authority figures. The students were happy to leave messages on forums on a weekly basis and held high levels of achievement motivation.

There are several methodological limitations to Zhao and McDougall's (2008) study. First, as only six participants were interviewed for 30 minutes, only three hours of data was collected meaning that limited transferability is possible. This coupled with the second limitation, that the participants' experiences may not have been very diverse as all were female, all were from the same department and all had Chinese as their first language. The third limitation is that in Zhao and McDougall's (2008) study, both Master's degree and doctoral research students were used. This is a limitation because Master's students' experiences are difficult to compare with PhD students' because of large differences in the pace of study, roles of the supervisor and support. Related to this is the fourth limitation - this study only focussed on Chinese students' experiences rather than a range of East Asian students' experiences. The fifth and final limitation is that Chinese students self-reported how often they messaged on the forums but this may not be trustworthy. Knowing that Chinese students sometimes suffer with face-saving and show deference to authority, they may have been posting in a performative way, to show themselves in the

best light. Therefore, the posts may not be indicative of coping but a way to merely act as if they are coping.

A study focussed on East Asian postgraduates' experiences of online learning, was carried out by Thompson and Ku (2005). This involved two focus groups as well as individual interviews with seven Chinese and Taiwanese graduate students of which four were female and three were male. Online discussion threads were available on Blackboard, a virtual learning environment. The posts on these online discussion threads were also collected and analysed providing complementary data. The students self-reported that they contributed more online than they would in the traditional classroom and preferred a blended approach to their studies. However, as with the previous study by Zhao and McDougall (2008), it is unclear whether they were contributing to face-save or to authentically participate. My question would be whether they are merely acting as 'the good student' or whether they are aiming to increase their knowledge through such posts online. The results further showed that the students were sensitive to feedback and spent a long time revising their work. The students also wanted more feedback than they perceived their American counterparts to want. In addition, they found American students to be more opinionated than them and missed elements such as the face-to-face communication. However, the East Asian students benefitted from the flexibility of online learning and could often work ahead of schedule.

Thompson and Ku's (2005) study with seven East Asian students revealed similar findings to Zhao and McDougall's (2008) work such as contributing more in an environment which was less spontaneous. A strength of this was that Thompson and Ku (2005) overcame the self-reporting issue by complementing the interview and focus group data with analysis of the discussion thread posts. This was useful in providing confirmation of what the students were saying. A further strength is that two students were Chinese and five were Taiwanese, allowing more diverse experiences to be collected. A third strength is that students could respond in either English or Mandarin, contrary to Zhao and McDougall (2008) who only offered Mandarin because the participants had this as their first language. The limitations of this study are similar to Zhao and McDougall's (2008). First, a sample size of seven is small, although Thompson and Ku (2005) also spoke to the two instructors from the students' course to check facts. Whilst triangulating methods may have been helpful for the researchers, it may have made the students feel uncomfortable

knowing that their instructors were also being interviewed. A further limitation is that if East Asian students may find group work difficult, it is not known how comfortable the students may have felt in the focus group situation. Although focus groups were carried out in groups of two or three, it still may have been helpful to ask questions about their comfort levels.

Another study focussing on East Asian students' experiences of online learning was conducted by Smith et al. (2005). Some 12 Australian and 12 East Asian students (from Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam) took part in this mixed-methods study. The researchers administered a 13-item Online Learning Questionnaire to collect quantitative data about self-management of learning and comfort with e-learning. Similar to Thompson and Ku's (2005) study, the students' online discussion posts were analysed. However, a strength of this study compared with Thompson and Ku's study was that the students' teacher was not involved. This may have reduced concerns that the students may have had about their grades being affected by their research participation. The results found that there were no significant differences between the Australian and East Asian students in terms of their self-management of learning. However, significant differences were found when it came to their comfort with e-learning. Whilst East Asian students were found to post fewer intellectual posts and more practical ones, it is impossible to speculate why. To improve, employing an interview method to ask these questions and to explore students' meaning making of discussion threads may be of benefit to both staff and students. This study differed from the previous two examples as it directly compared the online learning experiences of Australian and Chinese students. The main limitation of Smith et al.'s (2005) study is that no qualitative data was gathered to corroborate the information gathered or to follow up questions from the questionnaire. It could be argued that concepts such as self-management and comfort with e-learning need clarification with the students as they could be on a spectrum and may change according to the situation. Therefore, probing participants to separate out how positive students felt with different elements of the online education experience may have been useful.

Another study conducted by Brown (2008) explored what social support might help reduce students' mild negative feelings, arising from having a lower English ability. The method employed in her 12-month study included four rounds of 90-minute interviews

with 13 graduate students. In addition, she carried out observations and a daily completed field journal. One of the findings of Brown's study was that the students did not enjoy being put on the spot by the teacher in class to answer questions and that when they were, they felt anxious and would fall silent (Brown, 2008). One particular strength of this study was that the researcher worked at the university as a Lecturer in English for Academic Purposes meaning she had the advantage of an insider viewpoint. This enabled her to ask students about their experiences, to observe them and have access to students outside of teaching times. Working at the university also meant that she could record how she employed strategies to help with problems such as students not wanting to be picked on. For example, she would only select students in class when she was confident that the student would be able to answer the question. A further finding was that strength of character was needed on the part of the student to overcome the barriers in the classroom such as experiencing confusion with the use of vocabulary. Brown's (2008) findings support previous studies which have shown that teaching staff can adapt their delivery and vocabulary to help students holding different cultural identities (Carroll, 2005a). It also supports previous findings that the onus is also on the student to aim to manage their own acculturation-related anxiety (Gudykunst and Niskida, 2001). Brown's (2008) study suggests that issues in the traditional classroom might include but are not limited to: not understanding lectures or seminars fully and that it might affect engagement as well as academic writing. Brown's (2008) study highlights that there can be strengths of working at the university but also that by directly teaching the students, this could pose problems. These problems could include students worrying about the impact of taking part in research upon their grades, being negatively evaluated by a perceived authority figure and the stress of potentially being picked on by the educator.

Brown's (2008) work built on the work of Ward who had previously stated that many studies investigating acculturation have been quantitative, retrospective and experimental or cross-sectional (Ward and Kennedy, 1996; Ward and Kus, 2012). Far fewer studies have provided an in-depth insight into the current experiences of students holding different cultural identities. Ward's body of work had previously shed some light on to shame, anxiety and frustration (Ward and Kennedy, 2001). However, having social support from 'home students', individual motivation and an extrovert personality could

all help buffer against these negative feelings (Ward and Chang, 1997). A criticism of the term 'home student' is that it does not reveal much about the student's cultural identity. The increased globalisation of education, online learning modes of study and possibility of mixed-race students all mean that this term could be limiting. It is merely putting people into neat categories which is difficult to do when students can hold multiple cultural identities which is increasingly found to be the norm.

A study which explored international students' acculturative stress and social support systems was conducted by Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015). Earlier work by Berry (1980) had defined acculturative stress in terms of feelings of anxiety, alienation as well as confusion around identity. Berry's (1980) work shares similar ideas with Bochner et al.'s (1977) Functional Model of Friendships which outlined why both 'host country friends' and 'home country friends' are needed. 'Host country friends' can provide help with language as well as academic support. On the other hand, keeping contact with 'home country friends' kept students connected to their own cultural identity. While online learning students do not have to deal with physically moving into another culture necessarily, cultural values can still be transmitted through educators and 'home country students'. Therefore, theories about acculturative stress are still of interest to those pursuing educational research.

Sullivan and Kashubeck-West's (2015) contemporary study built on Bochner et al.'s (1977) work and echoes the concepts found in Berry's (1980) acculturation grid. Sullivan and Kashubeck-West's (2015) differed from Brown's (2008) study. It utilised survey measures rather than interviews, participant observations or documentary evidence. Demographic data was collected including gender, age, whether they were an undergraduate or postgraduate, their academic program, relationship status, sexual orientation, length of time in the United States, length of time on campus, country and region of origin, religion, ethnicity and race as well as questions relating to English ability. Three measures of acculturation were included. These were the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS; Sandhu and Asrabadi, 1998), the East Asian Acculturation Measure (EAAM; Barry, 2001) and the Index of Sojourner Social Support (ISSS) (Ong and Ward, 2005). These were disseminated to a total of 104 international students. Of these, 57 were undergraduates and 47 were postgraduate students. The results found that students experienced the concept of marginalization mentioned by Berry (1980). This

may be because of the pressures of studying in a new culture. One strength of this study is that it used measures more appropriate for focussing on students' experiences rather than immigrant experiences, unlike Brown (2008). A second strength of this study is that it allowed standardised questions to be posed to many students. This illuminates a key advantage of online education for students with different cultural identities. Studying online may remove the feeling of being homesick as students do not necessarily need to uproot themselves from their families. However, a limitation of this study is that it did not allow students to be probed further about the reasons behind their answers. It may be that other external factors played a part in their self-reported stress, but this cannot be inferred from a quantitative response alone.

Social identity and broader social labels may affect how individuals view themselves. One theory of identity is the social psychological theory known as Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 2004). The central tenet of Social Identity Theory is that in social situations, people may categorise themselves as part of a larger group rather than as an individual. It is this broader social identity that a person chooses for themselves or that is imposed upon them that may shape their behaviour when in social situations. It is not the objective differences between people which are important when studying intergroup behaviour but the perceived or subjective differences (Hahn Tapper, 2013). In addition, this theory shows that simply labelling someone as 'other' can create perceived differences showing how group membership is imagined (Hahn Tapper, 2013). Therefore, careful consideration of how educators treat students holding different cultural identities is needed. 'Othering' is a term used in a social science context to mean viewing or treating a group of people as intrinsically different to another group. It is closely related to power relations and can create feelings of superiority and inferiority between groups. 'Othering' was coined by cultural theorist Said (1978) defining this concept as falsely believing that an ethnic minority groups' beliefs are fundamentally different and therefore a threat to the rest of society. Social Identity Theory has been built upon in Social Psychology and has proved useful for explaining many different in-group and out-group behaviours including wider world issues such as the persecution of minorities.

One of the many strengths of Social Identity Theory is that it illuminates how fluid identity is. A person can choose to have multiple identities and some of these may come to the fore depending on who they are socially engaging with. To promote inclusivity in the

online learning environment, it is of paramount importance to understand if perceived cultural distance may exist between different groups. If barriers arise from this, the onus is partly on educators to help remove them. Another strength is that this theory suggests that understanding identities and where they come from might reduce conflict and ease a student's own personal conflict. If some students with different cultural identities are resilient and adaptable then disseminating information about how well students cope, why they cope and how staff and students can contribute to this is important to do. One drawback of Social Identity Theory is that if a researcher is to rigidly adopt its principles, this may mean that they ignore individual differences and personality at the expense of social and political factors. A second drawback of Social Identity Theory is that it is broad and has been used to over-generalise.

In addition to exploring broader social labels, because of the focus of the current study on cultural identity, it is necessary to look at models which have considered the changing nature of cultural identity. Berry's (1980) model of acculturation is one such example. Acculturation is widely accepted to refer to the strategies employed in the process of people trying to negotiate their heritage group as well as the new wider society (Berry et al., 1990). In brief, Berry et al. (1990) outlined a framework to help illustrate the psychological changes that individuals may go through when trying to navigate a new culture (Berry, 1980).

If students fulfilled both values, this results in full integration within a new culture. This would imply that they did not only fit in with the new culture but that they managed to uphold their own cultural values too. If they value relationships with the host culture but in doing so relinquish their own cultural identity, this results in assimilation. This would imply that they did fit in with the new culture but had lost some of their original cultural identity in the process. One limitation of this model is that it assumes that the host identity and new identity might be very distinct from one another. The lines between identities may be blurrier and more difficult to separate out.

One of the two negative outcomes in Berry's (1980) research was that if a student did not have connections with the host culture but still felt a sense of belonging to their original place of origin, this could result in separation. Finally, if a student did not want to begin friendships with peers from the host culture and had lost touch with their own cultural

identity, this could result in marginalization – known to be the worst of the four possible strategies. This outcome was associated with the most acculturative stress such as feelings of detachment, anxiety and low mood.

In the next section, I discuss the literature which relates to parental influence.

2.5 Parental influence

As clearly stated in Section 2.2, the literature search was broadly divided into two. In line with a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach, whilst some literature is searched for in advance of data collection, it is common to search for literature which connects to the findings which emerge from the data. Following the data collection, the search strategy set out in Section 2.2 led to the discovery of new literature relating to the central themes outlined in Section 4.4 (Family values), Section 4.5 ('Cultural bumps') and Section 4.6 (Sources of motivation). Within family values sits the sub-theme of parental influence.

Balestrini and Stoeger (2018) set out to explore a phenomenon that they named a 'Special Cultural Emphasis on Learning and Education' (SCELE). They wanted to look at whether SCELE exists and permeates in East Asian cultures. However, it was noted by Balestrini and Stoeger (2018) that there can be issues here with self-reporting biases as well as trying to generalise the findings from individuals to be synonymous with those of lots of individuals from a culture.

To try to circumvent these issues and rule out individual participation, the authors analysed texts to explore the media and societal representations of SCELE. The authors had noted that other researchers such as Phillipson (2013) and Siu (1992) had previously tried to explain that some cultural characteristics of East Asian cultures could be effort-focussed learning, pragmatic approaches to learning and a high regard for education. However, Balestrini and Stoeger (2018) criticised these for being emic rather than etic as other cultures may also place importance and value on learning and education. A societal culture has been defined as:

"the latent, normative value system, external to the individual, which underlies and justifies the functioning of societal institutions" (Schwartz, 2014, p. 6).

East Asian cultures tend to put more focus on individuals being interdependent and interconnected whereas Western cultures place more emphasis on individuals being independent (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Education in East Asia is said to be:

“an organised means by which children learn to adapt themselves to the expectations of the larger community” (Cheng, 1998, p. 15).

However, it could be argued that this is also the case in education services in the West. Linked to the importance of culturally competent practitioners is work by Reid (1999) who highlights that the models which teach guidance and theory to career advisers do not adequately advise on how to empathize with people who may have different group membership or be part of marginalised cultures. She warns that creating in-groups and out-groups can repress marginalised groups and that avoiding cultural stereotypes is key. After all, there are debates as to whether viewing a person in terms of their superordinate group identity or in terms of what Reid (1999) calls their individual agency is the most important. To caveat this, Reid (1999) also states that it is important to not undermine finding out about the collective experience of marginalised people. She encourages career advisers to look for the real rather than presumed needs of people, to take a multicultural approach. Finding out about similarities and differences with cultural values that other individuals, who may belong to wider cultural groups, also hold dear is important.

One recent study conducted by Cheong et al. (2018) explored an under-researched question: ‘Is there a divergence between parents’ and their HEI-going children’s perceptions of education and employability?’. Whilst there have been many studies which have investigated parental influence over educational choices in the Western literature, there has been scant attention given to this issue in East Asian literature. It is of note that in East Asian cultures, high value is placed on education and East Asian parents want the best education for their children (Breitenstein, 2013; Yan, 2015). The central issue which prompted Cheong et al.’s (2018) research is that parents’ choices of education for their children may not always be a good fit. There can be a number of reasons for this. One reason might be that the child is not good at or interested in the subject that the parent might like them to be. A second reason might be that there have been societal shifts in what demands there are for particular jobs, for example, technological advances. A third

reason might be that there have been societal shifts in people wanting more career mobility rather than one set job for life.

Cheong et al. (2018) used a mixed-methods approach consisting of a specific online questionnaire (the 2015 Graduate Employment Study survey) as well as four focus groups. Some 358 students and 31 parents responded to the questionnaire and 40 students took part in the four follow-up focus groups. More females than males took part and 78 per cent of the respondents were Malaysian. The findings showed that parents viewed foreign higher education institutions (HEIs) as more prestigious and more likely to lead to employment than local HEIs. The findings showed that the students did not agree. In addition, 58 per cent of the students said that their parents had helped them decide which HEI to attend. Whether learning is a destination or a process and whether a flexible approach to a career is needed may be a point of disagreement between parents and students. Parents in Cheong et al.'s (2018) study viewed a job as permanent and in terms of 'hard skills', whereas students viewed having 'soft skills' and flexibility as important in order to have multiple jobs and freedom to move within their careers. A criticism offered by Cheong et al. (2018) is that there may be differences within East Asian perspectives. There could be situational differences in the role of parents in helping children to make decisions about their education and future employment.

Cho and Cho's (2019) study was carried out at a Korean university and a survey method was utilised and analysed. The findings were that deep-rooted Confucian beliefs can have an influence over the degrees which their adult children select. For the students, their satisfaction in their degree selection was mainly linked to their own thoughts and feelings. For the parents, their satisfaction in their adult child's degree selection was mainly linked to the family values. The findings of Cho and Cho's (2019) study can in part be explained by Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Bandura, 1995). A strength of SCCT is that it accounts for the social psychological aspects of choosing a university degree and extends to other cultures as it can help to explain how parents are so central in helping students to make personal decisions. It is known that what parents think of their adult children and the expectations that they hold can serve as supportive or present a barrier, particularly when the decisions are highly personal (Mujtaba and Reiss, 2014). Some researchers have found that SCCT can affect whether males or females select certain

university degree paths. For example, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) selection can be affected by parent and teacher encouragement (Sahin et al., 2018). Parents' prejudicial beliefs that women would not fare as well as men in maths subjects negatively affected women (Gunderson et al., 2012).

A strength of Cho and Cho's (2019) study is that parents' influence over education choices is not limited to Korea but extends to Japan, China and Singapore. However, there are some limitations to their study. One such limitation is that the focus was narrow, only engineering students were used and there was a focus on academic performance perhaps at the expense of students' experiences of studying. Another limitation was that the authors did not directly ask about how they perceived technology to help or hinder them in their studies. This highlights a gap in the literature for qualitative studies which try to unpack key questions such as this. Parents' expectations of university can lead the students to be more proactive and give a stronger sense of pride. It is an area that may need more attention in future studies to highlight what role parents play in helping people choose their degrees and future career paths. This issue seems more pertinent as for the current generation of East Asian students, decisions about degrees are described as more 'horizontal' than in the previous generation, where parent and child have more of an equal status in the decision-making process (Ahn et al., 2008). This leads to the question of whether East Asian cultures are perhaps becoming more flexible and putting the onus back on the student. It may be that technology has radically altered the future of education and employment and, as a result, students are no longer needing to be 'taught' by their parents but develop mastery.

Kindt (2018) analysed their own interview data to explore the construction of identity. The way in which identities are constructed are not fluid, not fixed and parents can influence the students' behaviour including the educational choices they make. Their study is one of the few to have explored the tensions between immigrant parent and children's educational choices. Kindt (2018) carried out 28 interviews with adult children of immigrants about whether parental influence shaped how they felt about their degree and educational choices. Two key narratives emerged. The first was that the children of immigrants claimed to have always loved the subjects and the second was that they were never pushed. Whether different cultures place emphasis on following in the family footsteps and obligation, such as in Japanese culture (LeTendre, 1996; Shah, Dwyer and

Modood, 2010) or whether they place emphasis on free choice and individuality may impact upon how people choose their educational preferences. LeTendre (1996) also highlighted that this dichotomy may give guidelines to immigrant parents' adult children about what classes as a legitimate choice indicating that some disciplines and careers are more preferable compared to others. Kindt (2018) explained that the resulting narratives may be less about showing the 'truth' and more about acceptance, that is being accepted by the general public.

Mun and Hertzog (2019) also explored parental expectations and influence but instead of looking at East Asian males and females, decided to focus upon Asian-American women, the so-called 'model minority' (Rodriguez-Operana et al., 2017) who were gifted and had begun university early. The previous literature had found that Asian-American students were often overlooked due to these cultural stereotypes (Henfield et al., 2014). They found that Asian-American women's cultural identities were influenced by their parent's culture but also Western culture transmitted via their friends, school and the mass media. However, less empirical research has been conducted to specifically explore the influence of parental expectations on university choices (Okubo et al., 2007). Mun and Hertzog's (2019) research left some research questions unanswered such as: 'To what extent do East Asian students' cultural identities matter in career decision-making?' but the authors themselves acknowledge that this would be a good line of future research to pursue.

Xiong and Zhou (2018) also explored East Asian graduate students' adjustment to a Western university. The authors carried out eight 40 - 60-minute face-to-face interviews and used either English or Chinese to converse with their participants. The authors were able to recruit the first three participants by them opting into the study and then a snowball sampling method was used to recruit the further five participants. All participants were either on a doctoral degree programme or were undertaking a Master's degree. The interview data led to the emergence of five themes. These were cultural differences, lack of support, financial stress - the final two related to coping strategies. These were utilising external resources and developing self-adjustment strategies such as 'forbearance'. The findings were that the students' sociocultural adjustments were impacted upon by both the stressors as well as the strategies which helped them to cope in the face of adversity. This agrees with Ward et al. (1998) who put forward the view that cultural differences were more related to sociocultural adjustment whilst lack of support

was more related to psychological adjustment. Similarly, Xiong and Zhou (2018) found evidence to suggest that perceived cultural distance was felt in terms of language, religion, values, status and race. Few studies have previously explored how East Asian graduate students cope despite knowing that this group may be at-risk of negative outcomes such as finding it harder to cope (Park et al., 2017). Some gaps in the literature remained following Xiong and Zhou's (2018) study, however, such as a greater diversity of participants and greater diversity in disciplines is needed.

2.6 Kiasuism

Bedford and Chua (2018) and Hwang et al.'s (2002) studies have been summarised. Bedford and Chua's (2018) study is the only qualitative study that has been carried out with East Asian undergraduate students to gain a clearer understanding of the impact of kiasu on their education. The authors themselves spoke of the difficulty of finding literature in this area with only nine studies being published broadly related to kiasu and only three of these had tried to conceptualise kiasu. The authors conducted 36 1:1 interviews with final year undergraduates from a range of diverse disciplines from a single, Singaporean university. The only criteria for participants to take part was to have Singaporean nationality. The interviews were short lasting approximately 20 minutes. The findings highlighted that there were two kiasu mindsets amongst the university students. The first was 'Don't miss out on a potential benefit or common good'. The second was 'Try not to fall behind others academically'. Unlike Hwang et al. (2002), Bedford and Chua (2018) purport that they could only find one dimension of kiasu as opposed to the two dimensions (positive and negative) that the former authors found to exist. Bedford and Chua (2018) also criticise Hwang et al. (2002) for overlooking the motivation that may underly the behaviour, the cognitive aspects at the expense of the behavioural aspects. For Bedford and Chua (2018), kiasu is defined as greed, selfishness and competitive behaviour and contributes to social problems prevalent in education. Kiasu is associated with inconsideration and there is debate as to whether kiasu-like behaviours exist elsewhere, for instance in Australia and in the US (Ho et al., 1998; Kirby and Ross, 2007). Kiasu is linked to Confucian values such as 'face' and identity. 'Face' can be broadly defined as self-worth based on social recognition (Bedford, 2004; Kam, 2008). 'Face'

concerns both students and their families, not just the individual. It is associated with but not limited to Singaporean culture.

Hwang et al. (2002) conducted 11 in-depth interviews and found that there were two types of kiasu: positive and negative kiasu. Positive kiasu was associated with being hardworking whereas negative kiasu was associated with selfish behaviours. It can be equated with a determined spirit (Hwang et al., 2002). It is an:

“obsessive tendency to get the most out of every transaction and drive to get ahead of others” (Hwang et al., 2002, p. 75).

One remaining question or further line of enquiry for other researchers or practitioners is whether kiasu is culture-bound or a global phenomenon. Future studies may also want to further explore the concept of ‘face’ which has two aspects: ‘lian’ and ‘mianzi’ (Hu, 1944). ‘Lian’ can be maintained if the student follows societal norms whereas ‘mianzi’ is related to prestige which can come from success in education.

2.7 Transformative Learning

Mezirow (2000) was a proponent of the view that Transformative Learning (TL) could take place due to two processes: objective reframing and subjective reframing. An example of objective reframing could be to read a book which might provide an alternative viewpoint. An example of subjective reframing could involve a person’s social support network or a form of self-reflection such as a research journal. Mezirow proposed that each person has a frame of reference, these are the values that a person holds which enables them to make judgements. A frame of reference could be further split into habits of mind and points of view. A habit of mind is socially influenced by an individual’s parents as well as their cultural identity. A negative example of a habit of mind would be ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism can be defined as when a person evaluates other cultures according to the perception of one’s own and can be positive or negative (Young et al., 2017). It can be negative if people make assumptions that their own ethnicity is superior to others. Alternatively, it can be positive if it inspires a person to reflect on their position. Similarly, a point of view is more liable to change as a person reflects. From Mezirow’s (2000) perspective, there are four processes through which individuals learn. Firstly, they may seek out views which already align with what they believe, this is where minimal

learning takes place. Secondly, they may come into contact with a differing point of view. Thirdly, the person reflects on the new point of view and their previously held view. Fourthly, the disorienting dilemma, resulting from being faced with an alternate point of view might help a person to transform a habit into reflection.

It has been asserted by authors such as Mezirow (2000) that the role of an educator is to help the student become more critical and to help them develop judgement-making skills. One limitation of this is that whilst educators may veer away from religion and politics or be advised to do so, it can be challenging to teach critical thinking when teaching certain subjects. Tensions can arise between the educator being seen as a fount of knowledge and particularly for some students whose cultural values include not wanting to offend. The educator may see themselves as a facilitator of how to critically think rather than to impose their views, they may wish students to challenge and to debate but this might not always feel as easy for some students. For example, in disciplines such as Psychology, there may be topics about educating children or the construction of national identity which may be constrained by the wider social and political context. Mezirow (2000) explains that educators should be provocateurs rather than viewed as authority figures, which is in direct conflict with how East Asian students view those who teach them. He believes that the educator is learning *with* the students and helps them to become more autonomous.

At the heart of constructivism is the idea that learning is constructed continually (Phillips, 1995). This contrasts with the view that learning is simply received or transmitted passively (Bada and Olusegun, 2015). Tam (2000) contends that there are four basic elements to a constructivist learning environment, namely, knowledge will be shared between educators and students, educators and students are equal, the role of the educator is to facilitate and that learning groups will be small groups of heterogeneous students. In short, East Asian students may struggle if there is a mismatch between the knowledge they hold and this idea of a constructivist learning environment. In other words, East Asian students may not perceive educators and themselves to be equal. Instead, they may view the educator as authoritative and therefore holding more knowledge and power rather than in this facilitating role (Zhao and McDougall, 2008). Not feeling equal in status compared to the educator could be a major barrier for students (Zhao and McDougall, 2008). Despite this, there are several benefits of constructivism.

First, learning is likely to be more enjoyable if students are more active in their own learning (Bada and Olusegun, 2015). Second, learning is likely to be more successful if students are taught to develop their thinking as opposed to simply memorising (Ultanir, 2012). Third, learning is never wasted, it can be transferrable to other situations (Brookfield, 1995). Fourth and finally, students who are encouraged to co-construct their own learning may have more ownership and feel a greater sense of accomplishment than students who are simply going through the motions or engaging in rote learning (Brookfield, 1995). This is of course dependent on what the learning is but in Western higher education where students are encouraged to be independent learners, a deeper style of learning may be more beneficial.

Dirkx's (2000) view of Transformative Learning has some stark differences compared with Mezirow's view. Dirkx (2000) sees Transformative Learning as more subjective than Mezirow, based on the self and the soul. Therefore, his view is more inward-looking compared with Mezirow's rational view. Dirkx suggests that Transformative Learning involves deepening a person's understanding about their roles. He believed that a person's life experiences and their connections to others helps them to make sense of the world around them. For Dirkx, Transformative Learning can draw upon emotions such as fear, regret, anger, joy, wonder and awe although his views could be criticised for being subjective. However, Dirkx's view only accounts for learning in which people not only discover more about a subject but also about themselves, not all learning.

More specifically, when looking at not only adult learning but the way in which Transformative Learning may take place in online learning, there is some support for the idea that online environments are not places associated with detachment and a lack of connection as previously suggested. Instead, online learning can be expressive, emotional and can involve what Dirkx termed to be 'inner or soul work' (Dirkx, 2008). In online learning environments, students may be encouraged to collaborate with others and to be involved in back-and-forth discussions. These are sometimes synchronously in a whole group, at other times this might take place in smaller group interactions, and more often than not, these may occur on a one-to-one but still co-operative basis with a tutor/professional through e-mail or phone support. In each of these situations, Dirkx' view seems to hold some truth as Transformative Learning can be fostered when people are forced to do the 'inner work' through reflecting upon others' opinions and

viewpoints. Furthermore, Dirkx' work is worth reflecting upon as his own examples resonate with my own project. He talks of how a significant proportion of online learners in his own study were international students studying in China, Japan and Saudi Arabia for instance (Dirkx and Smith, 2009). He argues that cultural differences may present challenges in online collaborative contexts but simultaneously online learning provides a space where students can be more honest, reflect deeper and tap into their unconscious as they learn to work through these challenges and differences. Others who agree with Dirkx have commented on how online learners may 'project' deeply held views through their collaborative work (Turkle, 1996). This can be positive as they engage and interact more and gain more from their courses than simply marks. However, a limitation of this view of whether online learners 'project' is that it is quite a negative view of what occurs. Whilst the lack of non-verbal cues can make it hard to ascertain meaning and intent, not all students might find it hard to decipher this. It may be more to do with dominant hegemonic practices and 'unsaid / invisible ways of working' rather than simply being online which makes students more open which is an oversimplistic view.

Cranton and Roy (2003) built on Mezirow and Dirkx's views, explaining that Transformative Learning is about becoming more open, about questioning what a person previously knew and allowing new information to guide them. Transformative Learning is strongly connected to Ancient Asian educational perspectives and based on a Buddhist principle of enlightenment in which the mind and body are both required to learn (Wang and King, 2008). This idea is represented in the Chinese words 'ti-hui' which translates to mean that if a person wishes to understand something, they need to do so as if they have encountered it in person or "*experientially*" (Wang and King, 2008, p. 139). This is in addition to the inner experience (Tu, 1979). At first, there is mourning about what views may have been lost but only then can new views be embraced. Transformative Learning is significant because it takes place when an event occurs which challenges the nature of a person's initial view which may result in a disorienting dilemma and a change from habit to reflection. How they previously engaged with the world was too narrow but by having social connections and conversations, perhaps with family members or educators, views of the world can be widened. Therefore, Cranton and Roy (2003) take the view that at the heart of Transformative Learning is the ability to critically reflect. There are two criticisms of this. Firstly, other authors such as Taylor (1998) believe that discernment and grief are

more important than critical reflection. Secondly, it is unclear whether the individual or social action is more important when Transformative Learning takes place. For example, if Dirkx's view is that Transformative Learning is about the self, then it may be that the purpose of Transformative Learning is to self-improve. It was suggested by Dirkx that individuation occurs in a spiral as it is a journey where the aim is to get back to where the person started but by knowing where they have been. Dirkx suggested that this is not always conscious but that activities and conversations can bring a person back to themselves.

An educator's role may be in part to help a student with the process of individuation which in brief refers to when a person begins to be able to differentiate themselves from others, it is often thought of as a journey to self-actualisation (Rogers, 1961). Being authentic (Brookfield, 1990; Cranton, 2001) involves teaching openly and honestly. It involves helping others learn whilst also being mindful that the educator too has a lot to learn about themselves. It means that it may be appropriate in discussions to reveal a little about the educator – not purely to feel good about themselves – but because it allows them to relate to their students. Therefore, the educator helps build students' sense of self whilst tapping into their own sense of self. Lastly, a selection of studies which bore resemblance in terms of their aims and/or proposed methods are presented with strengths and limitations of each. In Chapter 5, connections are made between these studies and the current study to show how I attempted to address these gaps in the literature.

2.8 Summary

Chapter 2 has identified that there is value in learning more about the ways in which cultural factors can impact upon how a student learns. Early literature originating in the 1950s explored the acculturation of mainly sojourners and migrants. However, this left a sizable gap in what is known about students who have additional pressures not necessarily linked to their geographical move to a different country, but to students who may study online. The early literature tended to focus on the negative aspects of acculturation such as loneliness, detachment and anxiety. It also idealised full adaptation to a new culture, although later authors had suggested that this was not realistic. Additionally, the chapter drew upon theories with their roots in social psychology and

sociology namely Tajfel and Turner's (2004) Social Identity Theory and Berry's (1980) Acculturation Framework. These helped progress ideas about the fluid nature of identity but at the time, online learning was not in the form it is today. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was no internet, no forums, no virtual learning environments. Nevertheless, some of the same issues have remained such as how students create their own multiple cultural identities when they try to negotiate cultural heritage with a new university embedded within a new culture. Such theories were helpful for looking at the social and external factors affecting acculturation but perhaps ignored the part that intrinsic factors might have to play.

2.9 Gaps in the literature and emergent research questions

The literature review has highlighted that over and above the reasons stated in Chapter 1, there are gaps in the literature which justify undertaking this qualitative study. Firstly, broad theories referred to when looking at acculturation and Transformative Learning highlighted a need for studies which explore the following three unanswered areas. First, little is known still about clashes of culture experienced when students do not physically move to study in a university. Second, cultural identities are known to be shaped by wider social and political factors but may have so far ignored the role of the individual and personality. Third, if students experience mismatches in what they are expected to do during their online learning course and what they knew before (for example, surface versus deep learning styles, rote learning versus a more critical stance), this may affect their educational experiences negatively. More may need to be known about how to prevent and minimise any negative effects of culture clashes.

There exists a gap in the literature for qualitative research studies investigating student satisfaction, as opposed to simply measuring international students against 'home students' based on educational attainment. There also exists a gap in the literature for tackling inequalities which may arise due to cultural differences. Furthermore, despite East Asian postgraduate numbers rising, the research dedicated to this group has not yet reflected this trend. Moreover, whilst online learning has taken many forms and is not a new area, the changing nature of ways of offering online learning has eased previous challenges, such as being forced to speak in 'real-time', but may bring new challenges

such as not having immediate feedback or being more passive. Whilst there is empirical evidence from brick university teaching, there is a lack of empirical work dedicated to online learners' experiences and often when students have been engaged with research, it has taken the form of surveys answered retrospectively. It would be of great benefit to explore current students' lived experiences to gain a better understanding of the highs and lows of online learning study and what part culture may play in borderless higher education.

The critical assessment of these related studies helped to provide further justification for the current study's design. Looking at the central themes has helped me to address the overarching lack of evidence specifically related to a range of East Asian students' views and experiences of Western online learning. There are many central themes which emerged from the literature exploring East Asian postgraduates' experiences of online learning. East Asian students generally had positive attitudes towards online learning (e.g. Zhao and McDougall, 2008). Another central theme was increased participation in online learning which showed that East Asian postgraduates were more likely to engage with online discussion posts, however, these tended not to be as academic but for more practical reasons (e.g. Thompson and Ku, 2005; Smith et al., 2005). Another central theme was that the East Asian students perceived the instructor to be an authority figure (e.g. Brown, 2008; Zhao and McDougall, 2008). Yet another central theme was the suitability of East Asian students to asynchronous communication methods (e.g. Thompson and Ku, 2005; Brown, 2008). In addition to these, other themes included strength of character, which relate to personality and the individual (Brown, 2008). Acculturative stress, marginalisation and culturally appropriate behaviour also emerged which relate to the negative aspects of encountering a different culture and students not feeling like they fit in (Sullivan and Kashubeck-West, 2015).

From the literature, the research questions were amended and condensed, to one overarching research question and four research sub-questions, to help inform the interview schedule. It is noted that 'students' within the questions denotes the East Asian postgraduates' experiences rather than all students. Further exploration of how the study findings could be extrapolated to theory and practice are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 but are not relevant here. The overarching research question was RQ1: 'How do cultural

differences shape students' experiences of online learning?'. The four research sub-questions were:

- 'What factors may shape students' decisions to engage with online learning?'
- 'In what ways does a student's cultural identity present benefits to participation in online learning?'
- 'In what ways does a student's cultural identity present barriers to participation in online learning?'
- 'In what ways can students be more effectively supported whilst engaged with online learning?'

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the rationale for choosing the best aligned methodology and methods for exploring the research questions. The justification for selecting a constructivist approach to answer these research questions is made clear from the outset along with critical evaluation of both constructivist and positivist approaches. Following this, a justification of the pilot study is given. The pilot study helped to shape the research design for the main study. A description of and justification for the sampling strategy and recruitment of participants in the main study is then given. This is followed by the data collection and process of data analysis as informed by a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). Methodological considerations including the need to gather a diversity of perspectives, working out how to gain access to such a specific sample in terms of eligibility, the use of technology to overcome geographical distance issues as well as the implications of choosing to transcribe every interview verbatim have been described. Ethical considerations including the cultural insider/outsider/inbetweener issue, power relation issues and researcher reflexivity are also discussed. These methodological and ethical considerations are reflected upon in Chapter 5.

3.2 Limitations of existing research

A number of methodological limitations of the studies mentioned in Sections 2.3-2.7 have been identified. The main limitations related to either the participants' demographic information; methods employed; lack of research into internal factors, such as the role of personality and individual coping; how to involve staff (if at all) in the research. Whilst these limitations were explicitly referred to in Chapter 2, to begin this Methodology chapter, a reminder of them in terms of how they provide a rationale for my own study's design is presented next.

Demographics of the participants such as female only, Chinese only and identifying students based on place of birth

There is room to build upon the previous studies to account for the tendency for them to focus on mainly females and Chinese students, as in Zhao and McDougall's (2008) study. In addition, some studies focussed upon students studying a single discipline or within a single department such as Education (Zhao and McDougall, 2008). Selecting students from the same department might be easier in terms of participant consent, ease of access and opportunities for snowball sampling, but it does restrict the different voices that can be heard. There are also risks that the students may have prior knowledge of each other and may discuss what is said between interviews. In my view, what would be useful to build on this earlier work, would be to gain an insight into the experiences of both male and female postgraduate students and to collect the views of a wider range of East Asian experiences who may or may not have a mixture of cultural identities. The way that students perceive themselves to be accepted, to be 'othered' and how they may feel empowered by creating their own cultural identities are important. I would argue they are of greater importance to study than labelling people by their place of birth alone as this presents a narrow view of culture and identity. Furthermore, an attempt was made (see Section 3.4 for more details) to widen the degrees being studied to beyond a single discipline. This helped with gaining an even richer insight into a range of experiences.

Strengths and limits of previous methods employed such as survey, focus group and small groups of interviews

Previous studies such as Smith et al. (2005), Thompson and Ku (2005) and Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) have collected quantitative data by disseminating surveys and conducting thematic analysis on forum posts from discussion boards. Whilst these have proved useful in terms of finding overall patterns of online behaviour, these omit the opportunity for researchers to delve beyond the surface, to probe and to find unexpected leads that they can follow up. For example, in studies where concepts are being asked about in a survey, it is hard to know how these are defined by the participants themselves (for example, self-management of e-learning and comfort with e-learning). Therefore, an in-depth semi-structured interview may be a more appropriate method as this allows the

student to define what they mean by concepts that are personal to them. It allows the researcher more scope to find out novel strategies for coping rather than a student selecting pre-determined options.

Another methodological shortcoming that was raised by earlier studies was the use of focus groups such as Thompson and Ku (2005). If there are issues with face-saving and maintaining group harmony in some East Asian cultures, then focus groups could potentially be quite difficult for some students. This may be explained by fears of being negatively evaluated by other people. It may lead the students to anchor responses to what others have said and then find it difficult to argue against louder voices. There is a space for studies such as my own study which utilised 1:1 semi-structured interviews, where rapport can be more easily established. They might feel easier for East Asian students who worry about the social elements of focus groups.

In addition, some of the qualitative studies outlined were limited in terms of the amount of data collected. Whilst it is recognised that qualitative research is assessed by different quality criteria compared with quantitative research, so commenting on the sample size is not always useful in one study, as little as three hours of data were collected from six participants for 30 minutes (Zhao and McDougall, 2008). In another study, only seven participants took part in the study (Thompson and Ku, 2005). In my study, more hours were collected so that more experiences and patterns in the data could be explored. It may have been that for earlier studies that they had reached theoretical saturation at an earlier point than in my study

3.3 Researcher position

Epistemology refers to what is meant by knowledge as well as questioning it, whilst ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and what exists in the world (Krauss, 2005; Tuli, 2010). Epistemology and ontology are inextricably linked but distinct from one another. Debate exists as to whether social science research can be approached in a similar way to natural sciences or not (Bryman and Bell, 2001). The epistemological position that I chose in this study was the constructivist position. I selected the constructivist position because I believe that it is people in society who create their own versions of the world, not that universal laws exist independently of society (Creswell, 2007). Constructivists are

open to the idea that there may be many ‘right’ perspectives (Walliman, 2017). The interest lies not in what any ‘universal truth’ may be, but in the ways in which people interpret the world around them and which others can influence their lives, such as parents or staff. My stance was, and remains, that there are multiple perspectives held by the diverse participants at The Digital University as opposed to a singular truth to be captured. In addition, my choice of a constructivist epistemological position was guided by the research questions that I sought to answer.

As a reminder, the overarching research question was RQ1: ‘How do cultural differences shape students’ experiences of online learning?’.

To be clear, a constructivist position was helpful for answering the overarching research question because I had asked ‘*how?*’. I had deliberately not phrased the main research question to be ‘*Do cultural differences exist in East Asian cultures compared with Western cultures?*’ or even ‘*What are the cultural differences?*’. I wanted to emphasize that my interest was in the participants’ processes of meaning-making in response to their cultural transitions. I was interested in the ways in which cultural values within the individual or wider society might impact upon East Asian postgraduates’ experiences of online learning. I did not know what I would find but ultimately, I found that the creation of new hybrid cultural identities can help improve coping with transitions. Full details of the findings presented thematically are given in Sections 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6. I was not concerned with causation but was more interested in understanding what the participants’ own perceptions of cultural distance were. Whether gaps between cultures truly existed or not was not being studied. I was interested in exposing what might lie beyond East Asian stereotypes and gaining a deeper understanding of issues as shown by the content of the four research sub-questions.

As a reminder, the four research sub-questions were:

- ‘What factors may shape a student’s decisions to engage with online learning?’
- ‘In what ways does a student’s cultural identity present benefits to participation in online learning?’
- ‘In what ways does a student’s cultural identity present barriers to participation in online learning?’

- 'In what ways can students be more effectively supported whilst engaged with online learning?'

I came to the decision that a constructivist position would be helpful in answering the first sub- research question as I was interested in uncovering the multitude of factors that might shape whether an East Asian postgraduate decides that an online learning programme might be open to them or not. I would maintain that a constructivist position would also be helpful in answering the second and third research sub-questions. This is because they are questions which are centred upon the perception of benefits and barriers to online learning for East Asian postgraduates, from their perspective. Lastly, a constructivist position would be helpful in answering the fourth sub- research question, to deepen an awareness of what support is open to student such as staff. Further details about the nature, advantages and disadvantages of the constructivist approach as relevant to my own study are now given.

I acknowledge that as a human researching other humans, I could not claim to be wholly neutral when carrying out my research (Walliman, 2017). Instead, my interpretations of others' interpretations will always be subjective; the views that my participants and I bring to the study such as our preconceptions and cultural beliefs are socially constructed (Maxwell, 2006). In addition, I acknowledge that I was part of the situation being studied. I aimed to explore how individuals socially construct and perceive the social situations they encounter (Walliman, 2017) and more specifically for my study, the social construction of culture and cultural identities. I had a need to understand what might lie beyond the archetypal East Asian who is quiet and passive, I did not seek to generalise but to understand. I wished to collect and analyse a set of ten students' experiences whose collective views might resonate with others who are similar to them. With all of this in mind, I am confident in my selection of a constructivist position to underpin my study as it is more sensitive to context and recognises that the participants and I were connected when they shared their stories with me (Yilmaz, 2013). In addition, I am confident in my selection of a theory-building approach (Constructivist Grounded Theory – more details on this are in Section 3.7 about the data analysis). Theory-building approaches are linked to a subjectivist ontology; whereas in my study, people are not treated as observable objects of study in a laboratory setting, as is often the case when a positivist approach is taken. Instead, methods which involve the researcher personally contacting the group being

studied, getting to know them, establishing rapport and adding richness to the data are employed (Ulin et al., 2004). In my own study, I did not see the people within the study as subjects to experiment on or observe from afar; I wanted to use in-depth interviews to gain the depth of data that is popular with constructivists.

Another advantage of using the constructivist approach was that I was able to find out more about the complexities and contextual factors around acculturation. A positivist approach could have been more relevant if variables needed to be isolated but this was not the case in my study. A further advantage of using a constructivist approach was that it lends itself well to research which could be considered to be sensitive. This was the case for my own study where the topic of the creation of complex cultural identities emerged; a topic where stories which may have been painful to recount and sensitivity was needed.

However, there were some disadvantages of taking a constructivist approach. Constructivist approaches can be time-consuming with regards to both data collection and data analysis. There is also less clarity on the part of the researcher as there is no guarantee that patterns will emerge because there is less reliance on a priori theories or previous literature compared with a more positivist approach (Yilmaz, 2013).

There are several advantages of the positivist approach which helped me to assess the merits of using it for my own study. The positivist approach lends itself well to studies where there is a need to collect large amounts of data quickly, such as surveys about psychological distress experienced by people during the widespread outbreak of coronavirus (Qiu et al., 2020). Details have been given in Sections 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8 in relation to the pilot study where a survey was piloted but ultimately was not well-aligned to the particularly sensitive topic being explored. A further advantage of a positivist approach is that the researcher can benefit from having a clear theoretical focus from the beginning of the research process. An additional advantage of a positivist approach is the ability to easily and rapidly compare datasets. The disadvantages of the positivist approach are that it is relatively inflexible because once data collection has started, protocols have to be followed to ensure quantitative quality criteria such as validity and reliability are met. In addition, the positivist approach does not account well for discovering underlying meanings that people attach to phenomena and where the processes are not easily understood. I would argue that the process of acculturation for online learners would come under this category

of social processes which are not well understood. This disadvantage of the positivist approach provides further justification for my decision to select a constructivist approach in the current study.

For positivists, the world is full of observable events that can be measured if scientific and objective methods are used (Walliman, 2017). Science often occurs in a linear fashion, with researchers building upon what previous scientists have found, with the aim of proving or disproving a hypothesis (Crotty, 1998). A deductive, theory-testing approach is taken by positivists due to this objective ontology (Marsh and Furlong, 2002; Neuman, 2003). Measurement and verification are techniques employed concerned with better understanding what phenomena may be connected or correlated and they are believed to be stable (Marczyk and DeMatteo, 2005). However, these techniques may result in the 'how' and the 'why' being ignored as they do not seek out meaning making or interpretations. Popular methods used by positivists include surveys, questionnaires and experimental studies (Denzin, Lincoln and Guba, 2005). Participants are often selected via a random sample, for example, a population or epidemiological study and data is analysed primarily using statistical analysis such as linear regression or multivariate analysis (Tuli, 2010). Now that the justification of a constructivist approach being taken has been described, Section 3.4 sets out how the participants in the main study were sampled and recruited.

3.4 Sampling and recruitment

Ethical amendments were accepted by both the Human Research Ethics Committee and the Student Research Project Panel at The Digital University in July 2017 (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 which shows confirmation of their favourable review of my proposals). The main study data collection period ran from September 2017 to March 2018. The amendments included having the option of triangulating student interview data with any willing university staff's interview data. According to the panel involved in giving a favourable review of research with staff, as long as no more than 30 staff members were interviewed, it was ethically acceptable to do so. The panel for student research was able to provide me with a sample of 67 eligible participants for the main study based on the following inclusion criteria. As I was accessing participants from the university where I am

both employed and a student, as well as because I was on the edges of researching mental health, there were some methodological and ethical considerations connected to this relating to power relations and minimising distress. Further details of this will be focussed upon in Sections 3.9 and 3.10.

Three inclusion criteria had to be met for participants to be included within the main study sample. First, they had to be current The Digital University students. This was for several reasons. As my focus was on online learning, it was most appropriate to recruit participants from this university. Second, participants had to self-identify at least in part as having an East Asian cultural identity. There are many different definitions of 'East Asian' students, however, typically this group refers to students with Chinese, Japanese and Malaysian-Chinese heritage. This of course is not offered as an exhaustive list. The Digital University routinely collects data about the ethnic origin of its students using Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data that is completed when students begin studying with the university. It takes the form of a self-completion field on the student registration document. These ethnic group values align with options on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) census although it is not known whether this is deliberate. Of the 25 ethnic group values held, three groups were most appropriate: 'Asian or British Asian – Chinese', 'Other Asian background' and 'Mixed – White and Asian' to recruit participants who best fit the above definition of 'East Asian'. Ethnic group data was chosen as a starting point as it accounts for the multi-faceted and complex connections between heritage, culture and identity more readily than nationality or citizenship alone (ONS, 2019).

The ethnic group 'Other Asian background' could have potentially been problematic as it may have included students identifying with other Asian cultures which are not what I had defined as 'East Asian' cultures. An example of this would be students identifying as Indian. To counter this, students were encouraged in their reply to the e-mail invitation to ask for clarification if they were unsure about their eligibility. This helped to filter the students as a small number of e-mails were received to query this.

Third, potential participants had to be currently enrolled on a Master's degree programme. Doctoral research students were excluded as their experiences may differ considerably from Master's students because of the longer programme, different pace

and different level of supervision. Undergraduate students were excluded to minimise power relation issues because I teach at this level at the university. It would have been less appropriate to interview university students that I may know through my teaching or research activities. This is because this might affect what the participants tell me. They may feel compelled to give certain answers or might be worried about the impact of participation on their marks or feedback. Having a more distant relationship with any prospective participants meant that I was more comfortable with conducting the interviews knowing that these issues could be minimised. The prospective sample that I used to recruit participants included a wide selection of Master's degree programmes as shown by the following table:

Table 2: Master's degree programmes undertaken by the prospective sample

MA in Education
MSc in Advanced Networking
MSc in Science
MA in English
Master of Business Administration
MSc in Systems Thinking in Practice
MSc in Professional Science
MSc in Technology Management
MA in Art History
Master of Laws
MSc in Computing
MSc in Human Resource Management
MA in Philosophy
MA in Online and Distance Education
MSc in Engineering
MSc in Finance
MSc in Mental Health Science and MSc in Development Management.

Participants could be enrolled on one of the following lower levels of the same Master's degree programme:

Table 3: Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas undertaken by the prospective sample

Postgraduate Diploma in Human Resource Management
Postgraduate Certificate in Business Administration
Postgraduate Certificate in Computing
Postgraduate Certificate in Technology Management
Postgraduate Diploma in Mental Health Science

Each of the 67 eligible participants were sent an e-mail invitation (see Appendix 4) which had an information sheet (see Appendix 5) and consent form (see Appendix 6) attached. Following the interview, participants were sent a debrief sheet via e-mail (see Appendix 7). Out of the 67 eligible participants, ten were interviewed via Skype. Based on the literature mentioned in Chapter 2 (more specifically, Section 2.3), as some studies had recruited far fewer participants i.e. three to six, I was happy to have had the opportunity to have in-depth discussions with ten participants. This provided enough depth yet allowed time to fully transcribe and analyse the data too. I knew that the number I could interview would partially depend on some factors outside of my control. These would include how many would meet the specific inclusion criteria, it might be the case that some participants met some criteria but not all of these. An additional factor might be weighing up whether the student felt that they had time to dedicate to the project whilst juggling study and work. After I had conducted ten interviews, I was able to see common patterns and was confident that little new knowledge was being generated. I had reached what is termed theoretical saturation in studies which are informed by a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach (Aldiabat and Le Navenec, 2018; Carmichael and Cunningham, 2017).

In terms of the sampling strategy for the university staff, I was provided with a list of contacts cutting across the different faculties: arts and social sciences; sciences and engineering; education and languages and business and law. From here, I was able to

contact the Heads of Curriculum and e-mailed them with my inclusion criteria. In the e-mail, I had invited them but also had said that if they knew of anyone else who might be interested, to pass on details or nominate them. This is known as snowball sampling which is often used to engage harder-to-reach participants (Lee and Spratling, 2019; Valerio et al., 2016). Two staff members responded and were interviewed. The first staff member interviewed was nominated by a different person and the second staff member e-mailed to ask if they could take part after hearing about my study through word of mouth. The staff were a central academic and a manager at the Graduate School at The Digital University. However, as such little data was collected, a decision was made to not analyse and write it up for the current study. It could be used to build upon in a post-doctoral project perhaps.

3.5 Demographic information

The key demographic information of the ten participants in the main study has been tabulated below and described here first (see Table 3). At all stages of the research, much thought was given to the complexity and sensitive nature of identity (BrckaLorenz et al., 2014). Even demographic questions asked at the start of the interview were treated sensitively and participants were treated with respect. The first column in the table depicts the pseudonyms assigned to each of the students rather than using their real names. A conscious choice to use pseudonyms was made in order to protect the students from being identified, especially on Master's programmes which could be comparatively smaller to other programmes such as undergraduate modules. Using a pseudonym would enable the ethical considerations linked to confidentiality and anonymity to be met (Roberts, 2015; Thomas and Hodges, 2010). Confidentiality is the need to keep elements of a participant's identity a secret (Saunders et al., 2015). On the other hand, anonymity refers to the way in which a participant cannot be linked to their responses, they are therefore re-named but able to remain unknown (Scott, 2005). On the consent forms sent to participants (see Appendix 5), there was a text box which would allow participants to choose a pseudonym if they so wished. As none of them filled this out, I selected a name starting with the corresponding letter in the alphabet to the number of their interview.

For example, Participant #1 = name beginning with A, Participant #2 = name beginning with B and so on.

The second column in the table shows the gender identity selected by the participants. Of the ten students interviewed, five identified as male, five identified as female.

Historically, some surveys prefer gender terms such as man and woman instead of male and female (Westbrook and Saperstein, 2015) but these were the words that the participants selected for themselves when openly asked. This data was collected from asking the first question on the interview schedule (see Appendix 3). Gender identity can be defined as a deeply felt, inherent, culturally driven sense and answers to the question about this could have been male, boy, female, woman, gender queer or gender nonconforming although this is not an exhaustive list (Hughes et al., 2016). Gender identity can be a less problematic concept as it gives people the opportunity to ascribe their own label rather than have one assigned to them. Biological sex for some people might be more constraining. The biological sex of the participants was not relevant to this particular study.

The third column in the table provides the ages of the participants, data collected from asking the second question on the interview schedule (see Appendix 2). The age range of the participants was 26 – 61 years. The mean age of participants was 39 years.

The fourth column in the table provides details regarding ethnic group values. However, as this is a problematic concept, a fuller discussion of measurement of this concept and how this influenced the current study can be found following the table. The Digital University collects students' ethnic group data using 25 ethnic group values which mirror the ethnic groups collected by HESA at the point of registration (Lay, 2017). During sampling and recruitment, three ethnic groups were selected which would best reflect the group of 'East Asian' students that I was hoping to interview. The three values were 'Other Asian background', 'Asian and British Asian – Chinese' or 'Mixed – White and Asian' which supports and maps onto those used at a national level. Within 'Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups' in the UK Census sits the 'White and Asian' group from my study. Within the 'Asian / Asian British ethnic groups' in the UK Census sits the 'Chinese' sub-group from my study. Within 'Other Ethnic – any other ethnic groups' in the UK Census sits 'Any other Asian background'. This shows that there are similarities between

the ethnic groups provided in national censuses as well as those assigned by the participants, which allowed them to be recruited into my study.

The fifth column in Table 3 below shows the participants' cultural identities. These were self-reported via e-mail prior to the study starting and during the interviews. Three participants identified as Japanese, six identified as either Chinese or a hybrid identity which incorporated Chinese, and one identified as Kadazan (formerly North Borneo). The ethnic group categories provided by both censuses as well as used by the Digital University were too broad. Therefore, my study overcame this limitation by letting participants decide their own cultural identity by asking them in the initial e-mail invitation (see Appendix 3) and asking the open question 'What is your cultural identity?' in the interviews. There is a growing general consensus amongst the population that ethnicity should be self-assessed by the individual concerned due to the problematic nature of the concept and risk of being 'othered' (Bradby, 2003).

The sixth column in the table below shows where the participants were living at the time of the interview. Three were living in the UK, two were living in Malaysia, two were living in Japan, one was living in China, one was living in Saudi Arabia and one was living in Austria.

The seventh column in the table below shows which Master's degree programmes the participants were enrolled in. Six were working towards a part-time MBA degree programme whilst the remaining four were working towards a part-time Master's degree in English; Systems Thinking; Development Management and Applied Linguistics.

Table 3: Participants' demographic information

Pseudonym	Gender identity	Age	Ethnic group value	Cultural identity	Country of residence	Master's
Anna	Female	51	Other Asian background	Japanese	UK	MA in English
Brad	Male	36	Asian or British Asian - Chinese	Scottish-born Chinese	UK	MBA

Charlie	Male	61	Other Asian background	Kadazan	Malaysia	MSc in Systems Thinking
Daniel	Male	44	Asian or British Asian - Chinese	British Chinese	UK	MSc in Development Management
Emily	Female	28	Other Asian background	Malaysian Chinese	Malaysia	MBA
Frankie	Male	39	Mixed – White and Asian	Mixed (South African/British /Chinese)	Saudi Arabia	MBA
George	Male	26	Other Asian background	Japanese	Japan	MBA
Holly	Female	27	Asian or British Asian - Chinese	Chinese	China	MA in Applied Linguistics
Imogen	Female	46	Other Asian background	Japanese	Japan	MBA
Jessica	Female	36	Asian or British Asian - Chinese	Chinese Austrian	Austria	MBA

The categories in Table 3 above appear to connect to the categories which were included in the last UK Census in 2011, although following an e-mail exchange with staff from the panel involved in student research, it is unclear whether this was deliberate. The 2011 UK Census was the first time that a question on national identity was added. Upon appraisal of how data is collected about ethnicity and national identity, the Advisory Group for the Office for National Statistics (ONS) revealed the complexity of the task of creating a way of measuring these concepts in a 2008 paper put together prior to the UK Census. This paper provides details of how terminology was decided upon and what issues there can be around them. One of the main aims of the ONS is to promote race equality, a complex aim where there is a need to include but a duty to be respectful.

The UK government needs to collect data about the ethnic groups which exist in the UK for four key reasons. First, they are legally obligated to do so because of the Race Relations Act 1978, Race Relations (Amendment) 2000 and equal opportunities legislation such as the Equality Act 2010. There is a general consensus that the social constructions

of ethnicity are needed to understand how groups could be treated differently, unequally and discriminated against (Aspinall, 2011). Second, if national and local government need to allocate grant money to fund underrepresented or marginalised groups, they need to be able to assess who needs it most and why. Third, knowing more about ethnic groups can help inform how policies which may affect them are created. Fourth and finally, government organisations need to know how services which help specific ethnic groups can be improved upon to best serve them.

The categories used by the Office of National Statistics are created to try to best capture the most salient ethnic group identities. However, the categories are socially constructed and therefore it is questionable whether they really reflect them (Bartlett and Fiander, 1995). They are subject to change depending on who is creating the categories and in response to feedback from people being forced to fit the categories. In the 2011 UK Census, the 'Chinese' box was moved from under the 'Asian / Asian British' heading, showing that the categories can be revised by census agencies collecting data and that they are not fixed but subjective. Similarly, an additional limitation is that it might be necessary to break down a multi-dimensional concept such as ethnicity into smaller elements, for example, national identity, language, parentage, country of birth (Burton, Nandi and Platt, 2010). Census agencies involved in researching groups constrain the ability to self-identify and therefore they face criticism for over-simplifying a concept such as ethnicity (McKenzie, 1998, Witzig, 1996). However, in practice, it is recognised that it may be harder to compare surveys year to year if they were broken down into many different elements.

As suggested above, ethnic groups and national identity are difficult to define. They are understood in different ways by the people who ask the questions and respondents who answer them in surveys (Aspinall, 2011). According to the ONS (2019), individuals belonging to ethnic groups completing the ONS Census survey may be more accepting of being asked about their ethnic groups because they are also asked the national identity question. This is because this enables them to hold onto their parental heritage and aspects of culture whilst also embracing a British, English, Welsh, Scottish or Irish national identity meaning. They do not have to forfeit one or another. Ethnic group categories can evolve over time and may be affected by changes in political attitudes. An individual's country of birth, nationality, language spoken at home, skin colour as well as geographical

origin and religion have all been used in an attempt to identify their ethnicity (Burton, Nandi and Platt, 2010). The inherent limitations of each of these historical measures of ethnicity are detailed next.

When researching ethnic groups historically, the only ethnicity statistics were captured about the country in which people were born. At the time, this may have been deemed acceptable because where people were born and where they most identified with may have not been any different, especially if people did not move far from where they originated. However, upon critical reflection, there are a number of drawbacks to taking this narrow view. This measure of ethnicity is not reliable, especially when taken on its own. It is not highly relevant to today when people can travel to other countries with ease, travel for work or study through online learning easily. This narrow view also fails to account for ethnic minority individuals who are born in the UK but the country with which they feel most affinity may be elsewhere. Previous studies have shown that parental heritage rather than place of birth is helpful when surveying some populations, for example, in patients in public health studies (Pringle and Rothera, 1996). Similarly, this view fails to account for individuals who identify with Western or UK ideals as they were born to a British family whilst living in a different country.

People with mixed cultural heritage may feel forced to choose the country they were born in over their parental heritage, even though they may identify more with the latter. Mixed-race respondents have reported that parental ethnicity is more helpful than reporting how they are perceived by their peers as it shows where they have come from (Aspinall, 2010).

In addition to country of birth, nationality has also been used to ascertain a person's ethnicity. However, as citizenship can be applied for and people can become naturalised for a number of reasons, not always relating to identity alone, it is unclear whether this is the best measure. The most notable drawback is that the experiences associated with feeling minoritized do not always disappear when a person has gone through the naturalisation process. The language spoken has long been seen as an indicator of the country with which a person most identifies. According to the ONS (2019), the emergence of more second and third generation of ethnic minorities further complicate this as they may not be familiar with the language spoken by previous generations despite feeling an

affinity with the same culture. All of these drawbacks show that it can be hard for individuals to really understand what the survey is trying to capture. Almost 25 per cent of respondents in an interview survey reported selecting a category as a best guess but admitted that they did not actually know which ethnic group they belonged to (Pringle and Rothera, 1996).

Another new way of measuring ethnicity has been the creation of double ethnic group labels for instance Black British or Malaysian Chinese. This has sometimes been referred to as identity hyphenation (Fine and Sirin, 2007) or alternating identities (Howarth et al., 2014; Zhang and Noels, 2013). The double ethnic group labels can incorporate an individual's origins as well as a new community with which they have an affinity. These labels may be liberating for groups who want to recognise both where they come from as well as to distinguish themselves from other sub-groups, for example, Malaysian Chinese from Mainland Chinese. To conclude, in the literature, it cannot be agreed exactly how to attempt to measure such complex concepts. However, an ethnic group combines ancestry, culture, identity and language.

Perceptions of identity are complex and censuses do not tell us how people came to select their identity. Qualitative research which tells us about how people describe themselves and what has shaped this decision was necessary. Terms such as 'ethnicity' and 'nationality' have been used interchangeably by survey respondents whereas interviews allow the meanings behind these terms, as understood by the researcher and respondents, to be uncovered (Mortimer and White, 1996).

In summary, much thought and consideration was given to the selection of the ethnic group values used to initially recruit the participants. East Asian participants were selected based upon the ethnic group values which they considered themselves to align with at the point of their registration at the Digital University. In my study, a second opportunity was given for participants to be able to self-identify once again with East Asian. While some studies referred to in Chapter 2 may have focussed on only one sub-set of ethnicities for example, Chinese, the current study did allow a diverse range of voices to be heard. Collecting data on ethnicity and nationality can be confusing and complex for both those who research diverse populations and participants who do not feel like they can be neatly categorised. Ethnic groups can be revised and may change

according to wider social and political factors, such as the example given from the UK Census 2011, but also identity hyphenation or alternating identities are increasingly common. In addition, it has historically been unclear whether parental heritage place of birth, nationality, language or religion are the best measures of ethnic group data. Therefore, I felt a responsibility to allow the participants to decide for themselves which aspects of their culture they wanted to identify with.

3.6 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate method given the research questions and controversial topic. All participants received the same e-mail invitation (see Appendix 4), information sheet (see Appendix 5) and consent form (see Appendix 6). Once participants had e-mailed me to express their wish to take part, I checked eligibility and arranged a mutually convenient date and time for this to take place. Participants were not financially remunerated for their time but it was hoped that the experience might be cathartic and enjoyable, as it provided an opportunity to speak about topics that might otherwise be considered taboo.

All interviews were carried out on a 1:1 basis using Skype as the medium as it is free and easy to operate. All interviews apart from one were conducted using voice. This single interview was carried out via the webchat instant messaging function on Skype because of technical difficulties. The order of conducting interviews was random and occurred naturally depending on the order of when the participants got in touch with me and their availability. A semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 3) was used to guide the line of questioning but participants were encouraged to bring up any topics that they thought might be relevant. The interview schedule included eight prompts to help guide the conversations whilst allowing for unexpected areas to be elaborated upon. The participants were asked about the factors which affected their decision to engage with online learning, what they enjoyed and found challenging about online learning, whether their cultural identity had impacted upon their experience of studying in a Western university, how they might define an East Asian or Western culture, whether any clash of cultural values had impacted upon their day-to-day experiences and about what helped them manage any clash of cultural values. This could include The Digital University as a

whole or specific staff. As I have drawn broadly upon a Grounded Theory approach, I had been keeping in mind whether I was hearing new views or whether they were beginning to overlap with those already presented – known as theoretical saturation. The interviews lasted between 40 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes generating much data for thematic analysis. The participants were sent a debrief sheet by e-mail after the interview (see Appendix 7). In addition, I took the decision to verbally debrief all participants at the end of the interview following the recording. During this, I thanked them and explained how participating might better inform my own professional practice and The Digital University's approaches to cultural diversity, helping students holding different cultural identities. I reiterated that their participation was voluntary and that I would keep their data confidential and use pseudonyms to protect their anonymity (as mentioned in Section 3.3). I reminded them of their right to withdraw and let them know that they could request a summary of the results of the study if they were interested. In addition, they were informed that they could withdraw their data up until May 2018 and that the data would be kept for as long as was necessary for the project, in line with GDPR regulations. Lastly, I signposted them to organisations such as NHS Direct, Samaritans, Nightline, Mind, Rethink and the Peer Support system at The Digital University. This was informed by ethical considerations; to ensure that any unintentional distress brought up by the interviews could be dealt with by a relevant professional if need be as I could not give any medical advice.

3.7 Data analysis

The ten main interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed in line with a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz and Mitchell, 2002). An example transcript coded in NVivo (qualitative analysis software) can be found in Appendix 8. The main data collection and data analysis process occurred in tandem as audio data were transcribed alongside the collection of new audio data being informed and following on from the previous ones. The active process of interpreting and comparing means that the theory emerging was constructed (Mills et al., 2006). The participants' own words are given in light of their own reality and the role of the researcher is to highlight this and to interpret these (McDonald et al., 2014).

There were three rounds of coding: initial, focussed and axial. These occurred in an iterative rather than linear way, as I constantly grouped, re-grouped and re-assessed the data capturing the patterns which emerged, thereby co-constructing meaning (Burck, 2005). During the initial coding stage, I read, re-read and familiarised myself with the transcripts line-by-line to orientate myself and to better understand the data (Dey, 1999). Next, on NVivo, I was able to tag the initial codes which consisted of words or phrases which depicted the beginnings of a category. These were often active verbs, for instance, 'Studying while working' and 'Understanding Western religion'. When undertaking Constructivist Grounded Theory, active verbs are helpful as it reduces the likelihood of researchers drawing upon pre-existing theories before completing the detailed analysis (Charmaz, 2006). During the initial coding stage, the aim was to provide a label for this emerging data as opposed to aiming to analyse the entire transcript fully in one single session which would be unrealistic. In keeping with the process of induction, it was necessary to keep checking the initial codes against the raw data to ensure they had come from the data and not been labelled because of previous knowledge held. In addition, the initial codes were not ranked for importance or prioritised, all were given equal status. I am confident during this first round of coding, that I was able to reflect upon the data rigorously and deeply in line with Constructivist Grounded Theory approaches (Saldana, 2009).

During the second stage of coding, focussed coding, I was able to begin grouping the codes into categories. I had compiled the initial codes for each of the ten participants and began to group these according to frequency of occurrences, revised the labelling of them to better capture the phenomena and was able to merge, omit and add to the existing codes to create a number of core categories. The focussed coding stage is more sophisticated than the initial coding stage as the researcher interacts more with the data and looks at how the codes relate to one another. I was able to find patterns by noting which codes occurred more frequently than others and then this allowed me to look at what can be referred to as "*gaps and silences*" (Johnson, 2014, p. 124).

There are tensions between trying to remain loyal to the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach but also reflecting and recognising that in reducing whole transcripts to codes, it can feel as though some of the meaning is lost. I did feel a bit like a positivist masquerading as a constructivist at points as I was interested in the participants' stories but had to make it easier to draw out points of comparison and contrast. The act of labelling and looking for frequency of occurrences can make the data analysis process seem numerical. However, the connections and patterns within the data as told in my Findings chapter help to show that the overall stories have remained. For me, Constructivist Grounded Theory is not supposed to be a magic formula or set of principles to help calculate findings. Instead, the principles can be applied in a way to ease the process of adding to theory for the researcher (Morse, 2009). The ultimate goal of any Grounded Theory study is to collect enough data to theory-build and my view is that the data analysis techniques were there to help me reach this goal, to help me show my participants' stories to their fullest and make it easier for me to spot patterns.

The Constructivist Grounded Theory approach is systematic in nature and involves disaggregating the material and this is needed. However, to counteract this potential limitation of 'counting' and reducing, I did find that over and above the categories and codes, I was building up a better understanding of each participant's 'whole' or their story. The more I read, re-read and familiarised myself with the data during the coding stages, the more able I felt to represent their experiences as they had perceived them. It helped that I tried hard to keep track of my thoughts and reflection throughout the process as it allowed me to track patterns of thought and to see what might lie beyond the codes that I was forming.

My thoughts and reflections were captured through memoing. Memoing is the act of recording reflective notes about what the researcher is learning from the data. For instance, the following memo was written to help me make sense of Daniel's transcript during the focussed coding stage:

"I can see that the codes 'Acculturation' and 'Perceived Cultural Distance' are connected as they seem to be about the way in which the student holds and creates cultural identities. 'Family Influence' also appeared quite a few times here and resonates with others' stories of how knowing their parents' past affects their future. Personality and innate desire for learning or deeper personality has come up. Career progression and work can be grouped I believe, maybe 'social mobility'.

Unsure whether to split a 'Sources of Motivation' grouped category into internal motivation and external motivation? I think a case can be made for individual personality, a strong desire for learning trait to be considered carefully from external sources of motivation, need to think about this, can consult social psychology literature later and see what other data says" (My researcher memo of Participant 4 (Daniel) - page 7).

The above six focussed codes for this particular student were then re-organised and re-named to reflect the phenomena which was emerging from the data and ultimately resembled the final three themes. This leads onto the explanation of the third and final stage of coding employed, known as axial coding. At this stage, the codes that have been grouped into categories are then further finalised as themes. In my own study, three core themes emerged from the data during the process of axial coding: family values, 'cultural bumps' and sources of motivation. All coding stages are relatively open-ended but come to a natural close when theoretical saturation is believed to have been met. This is the point at which the researcher is satisfied that the theory being constructed from the data is now not generating anything additional.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) and more recently others such as Charmaz (2006) and Timmermans and Tavory (2012) have adopted the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach and added new thinking. It is not specific to the field of education but is also used in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and medical research. Grounded Theory places emphasis on the need for meticulous data analysis, coding and supporting this with memos. This approach does not view the data analysis process as linear but as iterative. The researcher continually familiarises themselves with the data and uses it to help them decide how much more data needs to be collected in an ongoing way. In Glaser and Strauss' work (1967), they posed a somewhat contradicting set of principles. On the one hand, researchers are required to use induction and show clearly how themes have been generated from transcripts, without prior knowledge. On the other hand, Glaser and Strauss (1967) also mention that researchers should be 'theoretically sensitive'. This would indicate that some knowledge of the theories behind the phenomena is needed. One major criticism of Grounded Theory is that there have been few new theories generated from studies taking a Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz claims that this may be because researchers are incorrectly applying Grounded Theory. To counter the problems with induction, Charmaz (2006) proposes that induction is needed but then abduction (producing a hypothesis based on evidence) is also needed.

Hypothesis-testing is then possible by the collection of more data to help verify the earlier findings. However, a critique of Charmaz's (2006) comment is that abduction should come before induction (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). This is because induction itself does not lead the researcher to new insights. To be transparent in Grounded Theory, it is important for the researcher to keep detailed notes during the data collection process to guard against the researcher trying to use the data to fit a pre-existing narrative. Therefore, I kept a researcher diary throughout to ensure that I was acknowledging my own biases and change of direction when it came to decisions or thoughts about how to proceed with my study. I have engaged in regular reflective practice to ensure that my personal leanings do not have a detrimental impact on the research. I recorded my ideas, insights and decision-making at key points throughout the process. I also used it to log my thoughts and to allow me to acknowledge any biases before and after interviews as well as during the analytic process. A strength of the act of reflective writing throughout the research process is that it can help the researcher to think more clearly. They may gain a greater appreciation of the phenomena being studied which I certainly feel that I did (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012).

3.8 Lessons learned from the pilot study

A pilot study was conducted so that three possible methods of data collection could be explored. These were a closed Facebook group, an online survey and semi-structured Skype interviews. A favourable ethical approval decision was given by the two key ethics committees at The Digital University (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). The same three inclusion criteria as the main study were used for the pilot study (see Section 3.4). Based on the inclusion criteria, the panel which approved student research at The Digital University selected a random sample of 50 potential participants. The participants did not have to complete all parts of the pilot. The pilot study was worthwhile because it helped to consolidate ideas about which method would be most aligned to the topic of interest. Furthermore, it also enabled assessment of what interview questions might be helpful to include in the semi-structured interview schedule to be used in the main study (see Appendix 3).

The closed Facebook group

As shown in Chapter 2, previous studies such as Thompson and Ku (2005) used the thematic analysis of online discussion threads to complement data gathered from focus groups and interviews. Smith et al. (2005) used the thematic analysis of online discussion threads to complement data gathered from surveys. Therefore, it was reasonable to explore the idea that online discussions may be a useful form of observing naturally occurring social interactions particularly between students (Meredith, 2017; Paulus et al., 2016). The result was that only three participants joined the Facebook group but there was no activity. No comments were left or discussions started. Due to this low response, it was decided that a closed Facebook group would not be used in the main study.

The online survey

Studies such as those conducted by Smith et al. (2005) and more recently, Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) had taken a quantitative approach. Smith et al. (2005) used a 13—item Online Learning Questionnaire to collect data whilst Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) used three survey measures of acculturation, stress and social support to collect data. The reasoning for piloting an online survey was that if the responses were short or less helpful, they could still help with the revision of the semi-structured interview schedule. The online survey consisted of six questions and took 15 minutes to complete. Participants were asked about: their reasons for studying with The Digital University, the perceived benefits and barriers to online learning, the positive and negative effects of holding an East Asian cultural identity within a Western university and support. Seven participants out of a sample of 50 potential participants responded to the online survey.

The survey responses only generated limited information about complex, sensitive topics and did not allow for further probing. In addition, it was clear that clarification of concepts in the questions, for example, ‘international students’ was not possible. This was important for my study as these definitions could differ from person to person and be open to interpretation. An online survey would not allow me to fully understand the process by which new cultural identities are formed.

The semi-structured interviews

The third method was the use of semi-structured interviews. Of the seven participants that completed the online survey, four consented to Skype interviews. These four semi-structured interviews took place in December 2016 and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The interview schedule content was similar to the online survey questions. One merit of conducting semi-structured interviews was that it indicated which areas participants might be open to talk about, such as East Asian cultural stereotypes and how deference to authority affects participation in online tutorials:

*“Passive, that’s another word...you know the whole stereotypical thing of the Geisha girl...the whole, I’m mute, I’m submissive, I will bow to your needs”.
(interview, CY, p. 26).*

A second merit was that the semi-structured interviews appeared to overcome many of the challenges of the online survey. It gave the chance for areas that had not been pre-determined to arise naturally in a conversation. It also enabled me to clarify any terms that were unclear. A third merit was that methodologically, Skype was found to be a good, practical solution to the geographical distance issues.

3.9 Methodological considerations and assessing quality

Participants were living in the following six countries: The UK, Austria, Saudi Arabia, China, Malaysia and Japan. This was a strength as I was able to interview participants still living in different cultures. This study enabled me to gain a greater diversity of perspectives. A second logistic benefit is that I was able to gain relatively easy access to a sample as there are dedicated panels at the university who can help with research sample lists which I utilised. A third logistic benefit was that it was practically simple to organise. This is because I conducted Skype interviews and chose to transcribe all of the interview data myself which meant I did not have to pay for travel or for a transcription service. Linked to this, was the benefit of becoming familiar with my data.

One methodological design consideration that I undertook was that as participants were located across the world, I had to be mindful of the time difference which restricted the timeslots I could offer participants especially as participants in East Asian countries such as Malaysia were seven hours ahead. A second methodological design consideration and

limitation resulting from the use of Skype was internet issues which affected the call quality. In one case to overcome problems on the student's side, I offered the Skype webchat instant messaging function. This also produced the added benefit of a full transcript. A third limitation was that the data analysis process was very time-consuming. For one hour of speech, it took over six hours to transcribe.

In positivist studies, terms such as reliability, validity, generalisability and replicability are commonplace to help with assessing whether quantitative research is of high quality. However, such terms are not all appropriate for assessing quality in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). Instead, four quality criteria can be used: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Credibility (also referred to as authenticity) refers to how trustworthy the findings are. To ensure that this criterion was met, all of the interviews that I conducted were transcribed verbatim to allow rich, detailed data to be gathered. It is often assumed that the greater the number of participants or text pages, the richer the data. However, the overall aim of the study and the quality of the data can determine how rich the data are, not simply the quantity of interviews or amount of data gathered (Sandelowski, 1995). I gathered over 12 hours of data from 10 student interviews, however, the trustworthiness of the findings is a better way to determine richness. A way to check how authentic or trustworthy the findings are is to ask the participants themselves. The process of participant checking can offer participants the opportunity to check the write up of the findings to ensure that this reflects what they believe was said (Yilmaz, 2013). I asked the participants to indicate at the time of giving informed consent whether they would like the option to do this and then followed up once their transcripts were made available, although very few took me up on the opportunity. In addition, sources can be used in tandem to complement or corroborate accounts of experiences (Cresswell and Miller, 2000). In my own study, I could have complemented the accounts of participants with staff and had designed the study to build this in. However, as mentioned previously, only two staff members came forward and so the data was not used.

An important issue relating to credibility and authenticity is the need to make sure that the process of abstraction from comments to codes to themes is clear. A reader should be able to ask: *'Do the themes give an answer to the research question?'* when interrogating

the data (Graneheim et al., 2017). It is accepted that there is never one single 'answer' and the researcher's best attempt at an interpretation is what is offered. Other researchers may always come up with a slightly different or alternate presentation of the data (Krippendorff, 2013). Transferability is similar to the quantitative concept of generalisability but refers to how the findings may ring true to others and therefore be applied in different settings. To ensure that a study has higher transferability, careful selection of participants at the beginning of the research process is key as well as a rich description of the study at the end (Graneheim et al., 2017). I believe that my findings resonate and ring true for others as I found when disseminating the findings to students, staff and other education professionals at a conference. This is discussed in brief in Chapter 5 and in particular in Sections 5.5 and 6.2.

Dependability refers to whether the research project is consistent over time and could be replicated by another research team. A challenge of ensuring dependability can arise during the coding process, as it needs to be clear that another researcher could come to the same decision with regards to which comments become grouped into broader themes (Graneheim et al., 2017). I believe that by making tables which show the intermediate steps, another researcher reading this doctoral project thesis could code their own data blind after asking similar questions and be able to replicate the study. Confirmability is a concept which refers to a researcher showing that their own researcher biases did not affect the findings. I believe that my study has met this as I engaged in reflexive writing and kept a researcher diary to document my thoughts and feelings during the research process (further details have been given in Section 3.10 in the Ethical Considerations section).

Guba and Lincoln (1989) later mentioned four further quality criteria to be considered: fairness, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and empowerment. Fairness is not favouring one participant's viewpoint over another but ensuring all voices are heard. This was evidenced in my own study by actively searching for negative cases, or what has been termed as disconfirming evidence (Miles and Huberman, 1994). These are examples of comments which appear to go against the overall findings. I did attempt to make clear what the most frequent response might be but sometimes juxtaposed this with a more extreme example in order to try to shed light on as wide a diversity of experiences as possible. A problem with researchers relying on their own lens to search for negative or

disconfirming evidence is that it is hard to overcome the urge for researchers to actively find evidence which goes against emerging trends (Cresswell and Miller, 2000). Furthermore, 'reality' is considered to be complex and there may be multiple truths which co-exist, so finding disconfirming evidence might only show that alternative accounts are out there (Cresswell and Miller, 2000). Educative authenticity refers to participants learning more about themselves by partaking in research. Research participation may be cathartic for participants as they may rarely reflect on their student experiences alone or with others. Catalytic authenticity refers to the research inspiring internal or external activity. In my own study, I believe that educative authenticity was met but I cannot know for sure whether catalytic authenticity was present. I would need to engage in a longitudinal design and follow up whether participation in my research sparked any activities or behaviour. Empowerment refers to the research helping the participants in their professional capacity. This may be an unintended and positive by-product and, as with my previous point about catalytic authenticity, it is hard to know longer-term whether my research empowered them. My hope was that it did in part help the participants to be more comfortable talking about sensitive issues with a stranger.

3.10 Ethical considerations

In Chapter 1 and earlier in this Methodology chapter, I mentioned the first key ethical issue which arose in the current study, the insider/outsider/inbetweener issue. The second key ethical issue was researcher reflexivity. The third key ethical issue was power relation issues. Each of these will also be discussed in turn with focus on the direct relevance and implications for my own study.

The insider/outsider/inbetweener issue

The current study is situated within an international educational research context and as such, I consulted the literature on cross-cultural research and ethical issues. Researchers hold multiple identities, including roles such as student, tutor or sister. These can be self-labelled or imposed upon them by others. Identities can include nationality, language learnt, ethnicity, culture, gender and age, and a stronger understanding of how these interact is warranted (Collins and Arthur, 2010; McNess et al., 2013). One such example is given by Katyal and King (2011) who conducted research in Hong Kong. Katyal and King

could be considered insiders based on their profession but outsiders based on cultural difference. In Chapter 1, I noted that I too feel that I hold both insider and outsider status but that this is messy and difficult to define. To complicate this, the status that I assign to myself, for example I see myself as both an insider and an outsider, might not match up with how the participants see me. For example, participants may view me as more of an outsider as I was born in England and do not speak Mandarin. Other researchers support the view that identities are not fixed but are in flux and go one further and suggest that researchers do not necessarily have the ability to shift their own positioning (Thomson and Gunter, 2010). Milligan (2016) proposes that whilst she might have had a certain image of herself, she did not feel that this was necessarily how others saw her. This was acknowledged by recording these feelings in her research journal, which I also chose to do. One criticism of this is that it is difficult to know exactly what the participants think unless they offer this openly or unless they are explicitly asked. In the current study, participants did allude to the fact that my surname is a popular Chinese surname and some did ask me about my upbringing to ascertain how similar or different my experiences had been compared to theirs. The notion of what I have referred to as multiple identities is not new but it may have had different names in the past. For example, Merton (1972) referred to this as 'status sets', these can revolve and different identities can come to the fore depending on the situation. Being aware of the different statuses is advantageous and reflecting on which ones are held and could be perceived as similar or different is important. It may affect the rapport with participants and the honesty and validity of their responses. My different statuses include: being English; Singaporean; East Asian; an Associate Lecturer; a research student; an English speaker. Next, is a reflection on my positionality and my status sets which highlights the conundrum I had about how much to share with my participants in a formal interview. Upon reflection of any similarities and differences with Anna in terms of my positionality, we shared a few of our status sets. I was also a part-time postgraduate and had experience with online learning prior to The Digital University and through The Digital University. Beyond this, I had also revealed to her a similarity between her experience and my father's. My father had remained in Singapore until 1974 for his initial university years studying for architecture before embarking upon further architecture studies in the UK. I also shared with her that I was also a 'checker' and a perfectionist. The final

similarity I discovered was that like me, she also loved learning and wanted to be a serial student for as long as was possible if money was no object! The two key differences that became apparent during the interview were age and language. She had made a joke referencing that she saw herself as a very mature student and also had brought up that English was her second language. I am in my late twenties as opposed to my fifties and can only competently speak English. Therefore, age and language as a barrier may have shaped her own study experiences differently to mine aside from shared cultural heritage. I had reflected upon how to move across these divides after the interview as highlighted by this extract:

“In terms of my own insider-outsider status, I did mention my own heritage but did not touch on my professional role. I need to give careful thought to how much I am willing to share myself as on the one hand, rapport is really important e.g. [Anna] knows about my parentage, a little bit about Singaporean culture and a little bit about my interests (which I waited until the end to mention), but on the other hand, this is at its core, a study about the postgraduates, not me. I think I am depending on my own sort of moral compass and intuition about how much to say, there may not be a hard and fast rule but I am being conscious of not talking too much! I am a bubbly, interested, sociable person so it is hard to be quiet basically! Having said that, as [Anna] did not talk about my professional role, it did not come up naturally so I did not mention it. However, questions about my interests did, which would make sense for me to mention”. (Researcher journal entry, 1st September 2017).

Upon reflection of any similarities and differences with Brad in terms of my positionality, we shared a few of our status sets. Firstly, I did draw upon my own part-time student status at The Digital University as I had done in my interview with Anna. I also drew upon being a serial student and the continual signing up to modules and further study due to enjoyment. Secondly, he was not afraid to ask me questions including asking me where I was born and what my upbringing was like before anchoring his own response to say he had experienced a similar one where he had the freedom to choose a path as long as he excelled in it or it was a favourable career. Like Brad, I had grown up in the UK and felt quite Westernised but had likely been influenced by my parents even though I had been to school and university in a Western country. As with the above interview, I felt it was important to acknowledge any similarities arising from a shared culture heritage, however, his job, age, responsibilities all differed considerably to mine. I had reflected upon this interview afterwards as it had prompted me to think about my angle when

questioning about participants' life histories as well as how much was enough to share about my own positionality. This extract highlights what I had reflected upon immediately after:

"Wow - where to begin! That was a really enjoyable but tough interview! He was very blunt, very straightforward and gave me some very honest advice about my list of questions but I know he genuinely wants to help. He mentioned that perhaps I could include questions where I ask people about which generation/wave they are. He mentioned that he was born in Scotland and his children were born in Scotland and about how he saw himself along that. Whilst he had been quite quiet about the culture questions which a resolute 'no' to how culture had impacted in learning, this later became a bit more guided by how early back you ask the question. Does it have an impact now, not really, I have been Westernised? But if you were to ask me about my roots, then yes, the work ethic has been instilled from when I was young? So perhaps, my questions are not life-history enough but that I hope to steer people to this. I think I liked how blunt he was and wonder if I should read more literature about this as I do think this could be a cultural trait. He did not seem to have a really bad experience but also spoke about just doing what he needed to do to get through. Whilst this might seem like something unique to distance learning perhaps, I am not sure that it is. When reflecting about how much of myself I give to these interviews, I think today I was trying to find a bit more of a happy medium and I did notice a change when I mentioned my interest due to my own cultural background. I have been thinking about markers and f2f, it may be more obvious due to my physical traits. He may have possibly known due to my name although he didn't say that and my accent (as with his own Glaswegian accent) was not a giveaway so I did feel the need to let him know what my link to this was. That he was not being studied as it were but that I am in part an insider...He seemed aware that there may be people affected (in which case I would need to write recommendations to help those - perhaps more to do with language though, perhaps if they are a sojourner or not born here or no parents with East Asian heritage) but also that there are people who are totally unaffected but he labelled himself as 'indifferent'".

In summary, the widely held view for many years was that researchers could either be the insider, studying a group who they felt they were somehow part of or outsiders, studying a group who they felt that they were different from (Breen, 2007; Pollack and Eldridge, 2015). However, this is now not seen as a dichotomy by researchers but as a fusion of both (Hellawell, 2006; Le Gallais, 2008).

Power relation issues

Related to the ethical issue of insiders and outsiders are power relation issues (Hellawell, 2006). What may be a more realistic label than an insider or an outsider, is the role of an inbetweenener (Milligan, 2016). I am arguing that my inbetween-ness in both my cultural

heritage and professional status may have helped the participants be more open with me. Between the two of us in the interview situation, this inbetween-ness allowed the participants to feel that their insights were valid, valued and helped to create novel and useful knowledge (Milligan, 2016). It has been shown that trust and camaraderie can be built between the researcher and the researched (Milligan, 2016).

Another limitation of having insider status only is that researchers can begin to look for what is different at the expense of taken for granted assumptions in an effort to appear less subjective. However, the risk is that this might lead to similarities being missed. This has been referred to as 'ethnographic dazzle' (Fox, 1989). I have not moved countries, am not bilingual and have parents who come from different cultures. Therefore, this might reduce this limitation as I am not fully an insider or an outsider as there are aspects of my own experience that I do not share with the participants. This has helped reassure me that being an inbetweener can be advantageous in research.

A potential ethical issue of being an inbetweener was that it could be perceived that I already possess intimate knowledge of what it is like to see the world through the participants' eyes. For Schuetz (1945), in a classic study, the homecomer is both an insider and an outsider which I interpret to be very similar to the concept of the inbetweener. It has been said that this kind of person can be referred to in Chinese as a 'hai-gui' which translated from Mandarin means 'sea-turtle' (Gill, 2010). This person was once familiar with a place, then went away, then returned but may not have as good a knowledge as they thought because things have changed. This means that they need to be open to updating their knowledge. I agree with this metaphor as although I do hold East Asian heritage, I cannot, and do not, claim to know all about the distinct cultures which could be classed as East Asian. Using this metaphor, it is questionable whether I can claim to have full familiarity with East Asian culture as I have not left and returned to a culture. I was born in England and grew up in England. However, being brought up with both English and Singaporean-Chinese cultural values, I could claim to be a 'hai-gui' as from my parents, I have developed familiarity with the two cultures. A large, enjoyable part of my data collection was finding out more about subcultures within a broad culture, the nuances, the differences but also the aspects of being an online learner that may be universal. It is not my view that only East Asians can study East Asians any more than only Westerners can study Westerners – this view is shared by other authors such as Merton

(1972). There may be merits to having some insider knowledge. Past histories can create the lens through which the present is viewed and previous and new knowledge can be fused together (Gadamer, 2004).

When I first set out to write about this area, my focus was on the educator versus the student and the way they were perceived at the outset. The focus was on how these status sets might have impacted upon my decision to exclude undergraduates. However, power relation issues are more multi-faceted and complex than I had first thought. Power relations cannot simply be mitigated from the start by a single decision but need to be acknowledged throughout the research process. This should be done in line with a social constructionist perspective which sees the researcher and researched as both being involved in knowledge production (Wang et al., 2013). Therefore, my view has shifted from one where it was 'enough' to exclude some populations or some degrees to lessen the risk of making the participants perceive me to be an authority figure. Instead, I had to ensure that I tried to minimise regaining power from and over participants through making sense of their stories.

Researcher reflexivity

One ethical challenge was that I had considered the participants' welfare and safeguarding and signposting them, but I had overlooked my own welfare. It was brought to my attention that I was not immune from feelings of distress which might arise from discussions about disorientation or loneliness. Therefore, I gained more knowledge of mental health support available in my community and at the university. I also continued to check in with my Third-Party Monitor for pastoral support. As mentioned in Section 3.9, I also made the decision to keep a researcher diary and recognised the need to be reflexive throughout.

I made the decision to start a private research journal early on in my doctoral degree on the 8th July 2016. Since then, I have written 233 journal entries over the past four years. They have helped me in many ways and enriched the research process for me, allowing me to process my thoughts and decisions and to work through emotional aspects of research in a constructive way. It is well-documented that the act of writing and reflecting

is advantageous in qualitative research to help the researcher become more self-aware (Elliott, 2005). Self-awareness can be defined as having a better understanding of a person's own strengths, weaknesses and beliefs which assist in understanding others' perspectives and how they are perceived by others (Finlay, 2002). Without continual reflection, it can be hard for the researcher to explore new or different experiences (Bolton, 2010). When writing my journal entries, I found that it was easier to 'stand back', to see my internal dialogue written in front of me and helped me analyse what needed to be done next (Bolton, 2010). Within qualitative research, it is good practice to examine your own cultural norms, any contradictory feelings and to make more sense of your own worldview (Nilson, 2017). Other authors have written about how helpful a reflexive journal can be to form the basis of a scholarly personal narrative (Newbury, 2011; Nilson, 2017). Personal diary notes have been found to be particularly useful for venting, clarifying and documenting interactions and thoughts prompted by them. Similarly to me, they have helped the authors convert internal dilemmas into action (Newbury, 2011; Nilson, 2017). They helped me to see what I was questioning and why, for instance, following the interviews I was able to see before and after what I was thinking and how this could have shaped the questions I asked during follow-up or how I self-debriefed to process the stories that I had heard. Research journals can help aid Transformative Learning which can be achieved when:

"...fundamental questioning and reordering of how one thinks and acts occurs".
(Criticos, 1993, p. 162)

For instance, some interviews helped me to reflect upon my own upbringing in a household where I encountered both English and Singaporean cultural values. A person's own upbringing is important and can scaffold their identity and their worldview so it was important to make this clear from the outset and for me to be reflexive to minimise biases (Mezirow, 1981). In other words, active reflection can be a good mechanism for checking for cultural sensitivity (Nilson, 2017). It can be a disadvantage to qualitative researchers who carry out research without developing an awareness of how their own ethnicity, background and values might impact upon the co-constructed reality in the research setting (Sword, 1999)

The benefits of being reflexive in a qualitative research project mentioned so far are that the researcher can become more self-aware and have clarity with regards to their

worldview. In addition, a researcher's internal dialogue can be translated into meaningful action. Linked to this is another methodological consideration which is the overlooked issue of a researcher protecting their participants but not being immune to emotionally demanding research experiences (Dickinson-Swift et al., 2007; Woodby et al., 2011). This next section explores this methodological consideration in more detail.

Less attention has been given to sensitive research, defined as areas that may be private or sacred and researcher protection (Lee, 1993; Kumar and Cavallero, 2018). However, emotions should not be avoided in research and can be essential in helping with knowledge production and rapport-building (Camacho, 2016, Woodby et al., 2011). With this positive, there can be the potential issue of those who work with the data either first-hand as I did in my interviews or those who may transcribe data only and experience emotional content in a secondary fashion to be left with difficult emotions to deal with (Kavanaugh and Campbell, 2014; Wilkes et al., 2015). In my study, the topic of acculturation could be considered sensitive due to bringing up intense feelings and possibly difficult past experiences. However, in my initial ethical approval application, it was rightfully brought to my attention to look after my own well-being as it could not be foreseen how similar their past or current experiences might be to my own. There is a responsibility to prepare novice researchers for emotionally demanding research and to prioritise the need for continual self-care where there might be vicarious or second-hand emotional load experienced (Emerald and Carpenter, 2015; McGourty et al., 2010). Therefore, the research journal was integral to helping me monitor my own emotions and responses to the interviews and to allow me to see clearly if and when I might need more pastoral support to help me as I went along. A recognised limit of the research journal is that it does not always help if the experience is not yet behind the researcher (Kumar and Cavallaro, 2018). In the midst of a crisis or difficult set of circumstances, it could be hard to thoroughly reflect. However, instead, I would argue it is still helpful to the researcher to help them make sense of their current thoughts to help them find a way through. In addition, this should be standard practice for all new researchers (Sherry, 2013).

It is generally accepted that in qualitative research, there is an artificial nature to the researcher-researched relationship. The researcher may appear to be more interested in others' lives and the researched may be more engaged and try to interact more than in usual settings such as schools or universities (Wang et al., 2013). In sensitive research, it

can be hard to ensure that the participants remain completely comfortable. It can be hard to ascertain whether the participants are fully freely consenting (de Laine, 2000). In my own study, I felt that I did use my skills which have developed from being an educator to establish rapport, to 'use' my warmth to elicit information. My motivations were innocent and in the pursuit of finding multiple truths but the methodological reading I have undertaken makes clear that the person listening can sometimes claw back power within the research process from where it initially lay, with the person who spoke and who talked, the participant. In ethnographic research in particular, there is a higher chance that interpersonal relationships will become more complicated as a relationship is often built up over time (de Laine, 2000). In my own study, as I only spoke to the participants on one occasion, I did not feel this same level of interconnectedness.

Following the interviews, participant checking was utilised where participants were given the opportunity to read their interview transcripts to see if they reflected what was said and to ensure validity. This is good practice to check that the participants felt that they had gained what was expected from participating in the research. If they felt exploited or dissatisfied with the way they had been depicted, this could weaken the overall validity of the research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). There is a great deal of responsibility on the shoulders of doctoral researchers because collating knowledge from individuals and extrapolating it into a wider context is seen as powerful (Walkerdine, 1993). This is because unchallengeable truths are popular in scientific disciplines (Walkerdine, 1993). When presenting the research, it is important to acknowledge this skewed power dynamic and to overcome this by keeping the focus on the participants' voices to ensure I do their accounts justice (Walkerdine, 1993). As mentioned as part of the second ethical issue about the need to be reflexive, confessional writing through research journals also has innocent roots, it is about showing methodological rigour and self-appraising. However, the methodological literature highlights that confessional writing too highlights power relation issues. This is because it is encouraged that researchers discuss their own conflicts, false starts and musings in a journal where extracts may become visible to other people in positions of power. Therefore, power relation issues do not just lie with the researcher and the researched but those who are the gatekeepers to the academic world (Ball, 1993; Patai, 1994). Relative to examiners and supervisors, the doctoral candidate and action researchers are the least powerful in the research community.

3.11 Summary

In summary, this chapter has shown that the most appropriate method, semi-structured Skype interviews, was selected to explore the research questions. It was the most appropriate for four reasons. First, this method lends itself well to the following up of lines of enquiry. Second, it also allows for the clarification of sensitive concepts such as 'cultural identity' and 'ethnicity' which may be understood in diverse ways. Third, there was a dearth of qualitative research on the topic of acculturation. Fourth, the constructivist epistemological position linked to a subjective ontological position taken was made clear from the outset.

A full pilot study was undertaken and from this, two of the methods, the closed Facebook group and the online survey, were not taken any further. I was confident that the semi-structured interviews would be the most appropriate way to explore the topic and this chapter outlined how the main study was undertaken. This involved ten interviews with the participants who were recruited from within The Digital University, all of whom were East Asian, postgraduate and willing to share their experiences with me.

The ethnic group labels were carefully selected from the data collected from the university as well as the need for a second 'check' with the participants where I enabled and encouraged them to self-identify with a culture rather than having one imposed upon them. An explanation of the data collection and process of data analysis as informed by a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) was given. The key methodological and ethical issues were included. An exploration of issues relating to revisiting the use of a researcher journal and the recognition of the importance of reflexivity, the insider-outsider debate and the multiplicity of power relation issues was put forward and has been revisited in Chapter 5. Now that the methods and methodology have been made clear, the next chapter – Chapter 4 introduces the themes, illustrative comments from the participants as well as analytic commentary.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the main research study. Overall, the findings were indicative that East Asian postgraduates' acculturation experiences at The Digital University may be shaped by their family values. In addition, their difficulties and challenges experienced may not be as visible as traditional culture shock but instead were experienced as subtler 'cultural bumps'. During the postgraduates' attempts to acculturate during their study period, they were also able to draw upon sources of motivation. The main additional source of motivation was staff. The findings have been presented thematically and there are parallels between the themes generated from the interview data in the current study and the central themes which emerged in the literature. Illustrative comments from the interviews have been selected to complement the interpretative commentary supplied. I made a conscious decision to include little literature in this chapter as the focus in this chapter is on the participants I interviewed and their voices. The findings will be compared and contrasted with literature in Chapter 5. Ten postgraduate profiles have been written accompanied by tables depicting the key sub-themes which arose from interviewing the East Asian postgraduates.

4.2 Participant profiles

Ten participant profiles are described to give deeper insight into the context of each participant. As was acknowledged in Chapter 3, and specifically in Section 3.3 when making my positionality clear, the profiles below could complement and build up a more complete picture of the researcher and the researched. It has been made clear that there are areas of overlap in terms of my background and the participants' background. I have ensured that I have told their stories so that when reading the thematically organised findings, any reader will have a deeper understanding of the past that each participant brings with them. The profiles should provide more of a sense of the individuals and what distinguishes their experiences from one another, whilst highlighting their collective similarities and perceptions.

The academic justification for the inclusion of these postgraduate profiles is therefore to address the importance of recognising that there can still be *“diversity in proximity”* (Ganga and Scott, 2006, p. 3). In other words, paradoxically despite myself and the participants viewing each other as at least in part of the same imagined community, other social subtleties outside of shared cultural heritage such as age were raised. The participant profiles allow a reader to be able to see how I as a researcher had to negotiate more than perceived cultural distance. Previous research with British migrant communities in Paris (Scott, 2006) and another study which explored ethnic self-perception in Italian immigrant families living in Nottingham, UK (Ganga, 2006) also highlighted how deep issues around positionality are. Scott’s (2006) research, highlighted that there were class differences which he had to negotiate through rapport-building as his participants were wealthy and privileged. Ganga’s (2006) research highlighted that there were generational differences to be navigated because she was a postgraduate researcher conducting social interviews with retired migrants as well as their children and grandchildren.

Following the postgraduate profiles, the key sub-themes generated when in the initial coding phase have been included in the supporting tables below (see Tables 4 - 13) in order to improve transparency about how these were grouped to form sub-themes. The tables are snapshots of the lengthier, more iterative process of coding, so it should be noted that the key sub-themes recorded in the tables are those which had been frequently mentioned within a transcript and where links were found to other interviews as more were carried out. Other sub-themes which seemed to be particular to the student were omitted, but instead have been incorporated into the individual biographies to help build a more comprehensive picture of the individual. The sub-themes were then further grouped into the three superordinate themes. The three themes were family values; ‘cultural bumps’; sources of motivation. The main findings within each theme will be discussed in relation to the original research questions.

4.2.1 Introducing Anna

Anna is a 51-year-old female living in England who was born and studied up to university level in Japan. At the time of the interview in 2017, she was working towards the MA in

English at The Digital University and was three years into her studies. She had taken a gap year part way through and was very much enjoying learning in a way that allowed her to study flexibly while working as a translator. She was motivated to study because she wanted to earn more money and move into managerial roles later. She also commented that studying was a source of great pleasure and joy for her. She had experienced online learning once before but this was quite different to The Digital University and involved postal materials. She was a Christian and regular churchgoer but had only converted to this religion after studying it within her postgraduate degree. She involved her friends in her work to help her proofread her work as English was her second language. She had been married previously and had no children; her friends were her chosen family.

Table 4: Key sub-themes from the initial coding phase from Anna's interview

Key Sub-Theme
Tutor Support
Understanding Western Religion
Friends Providing Support
Language
Studying as a Source of Joy
Peer Support
Participation Difficulties

4.2.2 Introducing Brad

Brad is a 36-year-old Scottish-born Chinese male living in Scotland who was juggling multiple responsibilities. He was studying towards his Master's in Business Administration at The Digital University part-time while running a restaurant business and raising his three children. Prior to The Digital University, Brad had had no experience of online learning and was due to complete his first year of study with an exam looming. He had last taken exams ten years ago when achieving his professional exams to enable him to become a chartered accountant. He was very candid during our interview about his view that whilst culture did not have a great effect on him day-to-day, much of his work ethic and decision-making was believed to come from his parents. They were heavy grafters and instilled a similar mindset in him from an early age. His uncle had emigrated to

Scotland from China first, followed by his parents and his grandparents on his father's side.

Table 5: Key sub-themes from the initial coding phase from Brad's interview

Key Sub-Theme
Parental Influence
Motivation

4.2.3 Introducing Charlie

Charlie is a 61-year-old Kadazan male working towards the MSc in Systems Thinking in Practice which he selected in part because it reflected East Asian values. He was residing in Malaysia at the time of the interview. He had been studying on and off since 2011 with a two-year break in between due to work commitments. He has no prior experience of online learning. He was balancing his studies with ad-hoc advice to the Government although was technically retired. He has previously studied accountancy in London, a part-time Master's in Business Administration and has experience of Western education in Sabah. He identifies as a hobbyist learner and commented that studying could be a source of joy.

Table 6: Key sub-themes from the initial coding phase from Charlie's interview

Key Sub-Theme
Learning Style
Studying as a Source of Joy
Studying to Improve Others' Lives
Tutor Support
Decreasing Cultural Gap
Unaware of Other Support

4.2.4 Introducing Daniel

Daniel is a 44-year-old British Chinese male who was residing in England at the time of the interview. He emigrated to England from China in 2000. He was working towards the MSc in Development Management and had been studying since 2002 with a two-year break in between due to work commitments. He spoke honestly about his parents' influence on him commenting that he felt that boys and girls in Chinese culture are expected to go into certain careers. He alluded to a learner personality that he thought he might have inherited. Alongside studying, he works with students from the Central African Republic and has experience of working across 30 countries.

Table 7: Key sub-themes from the initial coding phase from Daniel's interview

Key Sub-Theme
Perceived Cultural Distance
Family Influence
Acculturation
Studying is Related to Work
Strong Desire for Learning
Identity Formation

4.2.5 Introducing Emily

Emily is a 28-year-old Malaysian Chinese female who was residing in Malaysia at the time of the interview. She was working towards the Master's in Business Administration programme and had been studying for three years at the time of the interview in 2017. After attending school and university in Malaysia, she studied in New Zealand before working in Malaysia, the Middle East, and Australia. She then returned to work in Malaysia. She has no prior experience of online learning and was impressed by the level of tutor support in her first year of study although this had varied since. Alongside her studies, she was working ten-hour days and finding the balance difficult.

Table 8: Key sub-themes from the initial coding phase from Emily's interview

Key Sub-Theme
Studying While Working
Tutor Support
East Asian Cultural Values
East Asian Friendships
Comparing Self to European Students

4.2.6 Introducing Frankie

Frankie is a 39-year-old mixed (South African/British/Chinese) male who was living in Saudi Arabia at the time of the interview. He mainly identifies as a 'White Westerner' but as his grandfather was Chinese, he felt that his Chinese heritage had influenced him throughout his life. He holds dual nationality as he was born in the UK but grew up in South Africa. He is currently living in Saudi Arabia whilst working for the British Council. His wife is from Thailand and he felt that there was an Asian influence on the family from her too. He was working towards the Master's in Business Administration programme and had been studying for four years taking one module at a time and had had one short six-month break in-between. He has had some prior experience of online learning. In his working life, he has worked extensively in seven countries and enjoyed working with students in Taiwan and Thailand.

Table 9: Key sub-themes from the initial coding phase from Frankie's interview

Key Sub-Theme
Differing Experiences of Forums
Lived and Worked in East Asia
Culture-specific examples when teaching
Defining East Asian

Family Support
Importance of Peer Support and Discussion
Western Learning Style

4.2.7 Introducing George

George is a 26-year-old Japanese male living in Japan. He was working towards the Master's in Business Administration programme and was in his first year of study having so far completed two modules. Alongside his studies, he is working in broadcasting. He has previously studied for a Law degree at the University of Tokyo. He liked that students on his current module were all over the world including Korea, Australia as well as Japan. He has never been to the United Kingdom but was looking forward to visiting London the following year.

Table 10: Key sub-themes from the initial coding phase from George's interview

Key Sub-Theme
Tutor Support
Japanese Style of Learning
Peers - International
Online Tutorial Participation
Studying While Working

4.2.8 Introducing Holly

Holly is a 27-year-old Chinese female who was living in China at the time of the interview. Both her parents and grandparents are Chinese. She was studying towards the Master's in Applied Linguistics and at the time of the interview was nine months into her studies. She was studying on a 'Fast Track' programme and had used a previous Diploma as credit transfer for her Master's studies. Alongside her studies, she is working in a related area and has formerly taught English and has experience of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL).

Table 11: Key sub-themes from the initial coding phase from Holly's interview

Key Sub-Theme
Good Access to Study Materials
Study Relates to Career
Language - Barrier
Chinese / Western Style of Learning
Self-Paced Study
Studying While Working
Tutor Feedback

4.2.9 Introducing Imogen

Imogen is a 46-year-old Japanese female living in Japan. She was working towards the Master's in Business Administration programme with the hope that it would improve her career prospects. She has some previous familiarity with Western culture prior to studies at The Digital University as she lived in London for two years. She spoke openly about how fluid her cultural identity is. She had felt mostly Japanese at first but now feels that she would describe herself as having a British or Western cultural identity now.

Table 12: Key sub-themes from the initial coding phase from Imogen's interview

Key Sub-Theme
Tutor Support
Evolved Cultural Identity
Barrier – Language and Writing
Benefit – Intercultural Learning
Online Tutorial Engagement
Studying to Improve Career Prospects

4.2.10 Introducing Jessica

Jessica is a 36-year-old Chinese-Austrian female living in Austria. Her parents are Chinese and her mother was born in India. She also lived in Germany for seven years from the age of 16 and picked up some cultural elements there. She was studying for the Master's in Business Administration programme at The Digital University as well as working full-time (40 hours per week). She had been studying for two years at the time of interview in 2017. She has some experience of online learning prior to this in Germany. She brought up topics such as being female in Chinese culture as well as about what motivates her to study.

Table 13: Key sub-themes from the initial coding phase from Jessica's interview

Key Sub-Theme
Asian Values
Family Pressure
Family Values
Tutor Support
Benefit of Distance Learning
Cultural Identity
Private versus Personal Posts
The Role of Gender

4.3 Framework for the findings

Before moving on to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the three central themes, this section helps to explain how the three overarching themes are interconnected. The three central themes are: family values, 'cultural bumps' and sources of motivation. The novel or unexpected central theme is in the middle: this is 'cultural bumps' which is connected to both family values and sources of motivation. The 'cultural bumps' experienced by the student were partially influenced by the family values held transmitted to them by their families. In addition, the positive and negative outcomes of encountering 'cultural bumps' were magnified or lessened depending on the sources of motivation they had open to them.

The first theme, family values, has two sub-themes which are parental influence and kiasuism. The second theme, 'cultural bumps', has three sub-themes which are perceived cultural distance, benefits of intercultural learning and evolution of cultural identities. The third theme, sources of motivation, has one large sub-theme which was staff. Each of these central themes has now been illustrated with comments and analytic commentary and link to the original research questions.

4.4 Family values

4.4.1 Parental influence

The findings from this sub-theme help to address the main research question RQ1: 'How do cultural differences shape a student's experiences of online learning?'. The study has helped to show that family values inherited from parents and/or transmitted through societal engagement with the cultural heritage are very important to East Asian postgraduates. One student who explicitly referred to the role of her parents was Emily:

"I always think that from our background, like your growing up background, you always have to compete with others and your parents always want you to be the best of the best. When I see the Western culture, it's totally different" (Emily, Malaysian Chinese, female, 28 years)

It was indicated that there may be an ingrained competitive streak amongst the participants and a strong work ethic. This of course could be true of many students but illustrative comments such as the one above seem to allude to cultural influence and perceived differences between growing up with East Asian parents as opposed to Western parents. There was a consensus that East Asian parents could be perceived as wanting their children to come out on top, to really give any task that they are faced with their all. As is mentioned repeatedly in this thesis, this is not to say that parents of children from non-East Asian cultures do not want their children to excel or to do well. What is key is that the participants in my study perceived there to be this higher level of parental expectation than they thought might exist amongst their Western counterparts.

The interviews revealed that the participants perceived there to be differences in the way that East Asian parents viewed learning and education compared with other cultures. Many students noted that they had grown up with the view that in East Asian cultures,

being highly educated was more favourable and that students were encouraged to aim high.

“The family, the cultural background, I think with Chinese, you always want to learn, there’s quite a high admiration for learned people” (Daniel, British-Chinese male, 44 years)

As mentioned previously, the term ‘East Asian’ cultures has been used as an umbrella term to group a number of individual cultures with overlapping similarities. It is in no way indicated that all East Asian cultures are the same; there will always be diversity which exists between different countries. There seemed to be a pattern, however, particularly in cultures such as China where Confucian values prevail as the above illustrative quote suggested. The East Asian shared values underpinning the cultures seemed to bind the lived experiences of the ten participants. One of the participants managed to sum it up succinctly:

“It’s like an invisible bond like that connects all together. I do not know why and I do not know how to explain that” (Emily, Malaysian-Chinese, female, 28 years)

Participants felt that having shared cultural values somehow made them recognise how similar they were to other East Asian students and in turn, made them feel distinct from other groups of Western students. This was not always as marked as might be expected in face-to-face settings though (more discussion of perceived cultural distance and overcoming this can be found in Section 4.5). The bond is not a tangible one, especially as online physical attributes cannot be easily seen, but the participants acknowledged and agreed that it was there.

Family values determined what subjects the participants chose to study in higher education. Ideas were put forward about what were deemed to be appropriate disciplines and careers. This was influenced by the participants’ parents and connected to this East Asian mindset or perspective about desirable careers. This may have implications for staff supporting students who go into professions heavily influenced by their parents (see Section 6.2 for a greater discussion of the contribution to professional practice of this study). As Brad commented:

“You can do what you want as long as it’s medicine, law, dentistry or accountancy (laughs)” (Brad, Scottish-born Chinese male, 36 years)

This sub-theme of parental influence highlights that there are tiers of good careers and less desirable careers in the minds of East Asian parents. As Daniel illustrates:

“There is this kind of legitimate, recognised profession but there’s also this kind of Mickey Mouse or Playboy profession. From an Asian perspective” (Daniel, British-Chinese male, 44 years)

The first main point raised in these interviews is that there is some parental influence over how education is viewed by students and that this follows them even into higher education and postgraduate studies, not simply at an early age at school. It is unclear whether it is a macro cultural issue, for example to do with the individualism-collectivism framework or whether it is more of a micro individual issue. If it is a cultural issue, this may align with the concept of Special Cultural Emphasis on Learning and Education (SCELE, see Section 2.5 and 5.2 for more about this concept).

Participants in my study reported that there were often mismatches between what they thought they should be striving for and what their parents thought they should be striving for. Sadly, East Asian parents often found it hard to accept if their child did not want to aim for one of the top-tier careers:

“For quite a few years actually, my mum didn’t want to accept it but in front of her friends she wouldn’t talk about it. I said to her and others I’m probably the only Chinese student to work with the poor, all the others come here to study how to make more money”. (Daniel, British-Chinese male, 44 years)

Daniel’s comment illustrates how some parents had conflicting ideas compared with the participants about what their career aims should be. Whilst Daniel’s mother felt that making more money was a high priority, Daniel’s focus was on helping the marginalised, which as he said was hard for her to accept. It may be that not all students follow what their parents would be happier for them to pursue and the results may be mixed.

The sub-theme of parental influence is also directly connected to the first sub- research question: ‘What factors may shape students’ decisions to engage with online learning?’. A lot of onus is put on the student by their parents to decide what to study and by what mode of study. However, culture, class and gender may affect whether a student decides to engage at all. Taking the decision to embark upon a degree and having a strong will to succeed was credited to the students’ parents.

Furthermore, as well as fixed ideas about acceptable career paths such as law, medicine or dentistry, some parents had fixed ideas about which careers were acceptable for men or women. This was despite the student having strengths in other areas, those that may have been perceived to go against the norms in terms of career selection. Daniel also notes that his own parents may have had preconceptions about what the ideal career path for men and women might be:

“In China, it also forces boys and girls into a certain path so for me. My dad forced me into it because he liked maths and physics so he is forcing me into that direction but never realised that my strength is actually in arts” (Daniel, British-Chinese male, 44 years)

My interviews highlighted that there is a divergence in terms of what the participants perceived to be good professions compared with the perspectives of their parents. In addition, this divergence might be amplified by the parents being East Asian as there might be the particular focus on high achievement and focus on learning or Special Cultural Emphasis on Learning and Education.

It was revealed that higher degrees were often pursued sooner in East Asian countries, at least in the eyes of the participants, than might be expected in other cultures. This in turn creates more people who are very employable, skilled, adept but who may be young and more vulnerable to feelings of inadequacy and pressure. In one interview with Emily, this notion was highlighted:

“Asians tend to start Master’s quite young at a really young age compared to the Caucasians so like all my other high school mates especially those studying in Taiwan, they would continue their Master’s degree when they actually finished their undergrad” (Emily, Malaysian-Chinese, female, 28 years)

Finally, this sub-theme helps to explore the third sub- research question: ‘In what ways does a student’s cultural identity present barriers to participation in online learning?’. This theme has helped to contribute new knowledge about what happens when family values may increase the likelihood of an East Asian student encountering what I have termed a ‘cultural bump’ (see Section 4.5) when embarking upon Western online learning. This first theme of family values, and in particular the sub-theme of parental influence, is very closely connected to the second theme of ‘cultural bumps’. The distinction which arose from the thematic analysis is that family values refers to the rules or norms prescribed by a culture which governed my participants’ decisions around

studying. On the other hand, the theme of ‘cultural bumps’ captured the surprises as opposed to traditional culture shock experienced when cultural values were met with opposition when engaging in Western online learning.

Learning more about how cultural identities are co-constructed and the role that the family may have to play in this is hugely important. It may be that education professionals’ own views do not match up with parents’ or students’ views and therefore additional knowledge could be used to help in staff development events to bridge this gap (see Sections 5.3 and 6.2 for more discussion on this).

One positive finding which emerged from the interviews was that students had enjoyed their parents influencing their strong work ethic. All bar one extreme case illuminated the challenges of being raised with high expectations as well as the benefits of growing up and being encouraged to work hard which often helped the students in their work, family life and businesses. One particular interview with Brad highlighted the strong determination to succeed:

“My parents were grafters, heavy, heavy grafters when they came over to the country and a good bit of that has basically rubbed off on me. If you want to see if there’s a cultural influence, it stems back as far as that” (Brad, Scottish-born Chinese male, 36 years)

At the end of Brad’s interview, he alluded to the fact that day-to-day, culture might not appear to have a great influence as he is ‘Westernised’ but he did believe that his cultural roots underpinned a lot of his behaviour and decision-making. He told me:

“I have been a studier, a reasonably good one in the past. But that might have been nurtured by the basic focus my parents had from a young age, so you can see it indirectly probably has nurtured me to what I do right now”. (Brad, Scottish-born Chinese male, 36 years)

Cultural values are not seen as innate but passed on through socialisation from parents. It has been shown that there may not be a direct display of culturally influenced behaviour. It may be subtler and underpin how a student thinks and behaves later. To further illustrate this, Brad added the following:

“Right now, culture has zero effect on me based on the decisions I make day-to-day but erm, but the way I go about things, my upbringing I’d say has made a difference...everything now has no real cultural association but I would say my

decision process well my ethics my work ethic is based around that” (Brad, Scottish-born Chinese male, 36 years)

This indicates a difference in the student’s minds as to whether their culture is having an impact upon them. They might tell education professionals, as Brad told me, at a surface level that his culture has little to no bearing on his decisions. However, once probed on parents and heritage, students start to see patterns emerge which may help to explain *why* they behave in a particular way. The invisible nature might make it difficult to see at first for all, including the student.

In some interviews, participants shared more information about their parents’ education and professions. When the parents themselves had achieved highly and were in desired careers, there might be the expectation for the student to follow suit:

Why I study with the Digital University right? OK, I think there are several elements. One is my family background, I think, because my parents are both, we call it, educated people. My mum’s a teacher, primary school teacher. And my father is an electrical engineer and both parents, my mum’s parents are both medical doctors. And then my dad, he studied theology with some missionary university in January as well, that’s the background. I think they really put an emphasis on learning and continue achievement, learning. (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

Not all family involvement was welcomed, however, and one extreme case showed that when parents were too harsh, this could lead to negative outcomes. In the comment below, Jessica highlighted how she needed to break away from the family:

“I mean China is very strict that you have to prove yourself and make sure you don’t lose your name, know what I mean? That’s one of the reasons I split up from my family. I made the choice that I don’t want the pressure, I want to live my life. I’m still continuing to work to get rid of this imprint from the family, to be the best. Because when I grow up, the only thing I get the feeling of is I’m a machine, I’m not a human being, I’m a machine.” (Jessica, Chinese-Austrian, female, 36 years)

As Jessica suggests, she faced a predicament in that she recognised that she did not want to live her life in a way in which there was a narrow focus or pressure to succeed. Whilst she wanted to study and wanted to do well, she used the image of a machine, explaining that she did not only want to study or work but to have a more well-rounded life. Feelings of being a machine could lead to students feeling alienated by the work set or lacking motivation.

Closely linked to the sub-theme of family values was also kiasuism. The key findings from this sub-theme and illustrative comments to further make these clear have been included in this next section.

4.4.2 Kiasuism

The findings from this sub-theme help to address the main research question RQ1: ‘How do cultural differences shape students’ experiences of online learning?’. This sub-theme illuminates the unexpected emergence of a particular culture-specific value which emerged from the data namely ‘kiasu’. From earlier literature (see Sections 2.3 – 2.7), it was known that cultural differences influence achievement but this research question was devised to try to explore *how* cultural differences can shape East Asian postgraduate students’ experiences. I was struck by *how* these culture-specific values could affect learning behaviour and how they seemed to be deep-rooted. I would argue that scant attention has been given in the literature to *how* kiasu among other cultural values really affect online learners although more needs to be known to help education professionals to support these students effectively (as has been suggested in Section 6.2).

Kiasu was brought up during the interviews by the participants and has links to a person’s national identity and national pride. This culture-specific value can be transmitted in Chinese families and may affect how students behave:

“There’s something called kiasu, it’s something in Hokkien if I’m not mistaken, they don’t like to lose anything. They tend not to lose in any kind of decisions, any kind of competitions. That kind of thing is the same across Asia...we [Malaysian Chinese people] have the mindset that we have to fight for what we want... the Westernized culture is like yeah you do whatever you like” (Emily, Malaysian-Chinese, female, 28 years).

Kiasu is often synonymous with Singaporean culture and whilst it has negative connotations with competitiveness and hostility, in the context of education, kiasu may be viewed more favourably as a value which encompasses wanting to do well at any cost. The motive behind some kiasu-like behaviour is to win. Its literal translation from Hokkien is ‘afraid of losing out’ or ‘afraid of not getting the best’. It is of importance to note that kiasu may be a specific cultural value but the nature of it is universally found. For example, in Western countries such as the UK, millennials are said to have a ‘fear of missing out’ (FoMO). This has been defined as when people become apprehensive when

they see that others are having positive experiences which they are not part of; a negative reaction characterised by feeling lonely or bored (Przybylski et al., 2013).

The findings from this sub-theme also directly correspond to the second sub- research question: ‘In what ways does a student’s cultural identity present benefits to participation in online learning?’. From gathering more data about participants’ experiences, I was able to address this sub- research question and explore the ways in which culture-specific values such as kiasu might affect participation. However, this sub-theme is also directly connected to the third sub- research question: ‘In what ways does a student’s cultural identity present barriers to participation in online learning?’. As the next section will show more clearly, some culture-specific values such as kiasu may bring with them challenges for the participants. These might carry over into barriers to participation due to having a fear of failure and wanting to avoid shame for both them and their families.

My findings confirm what others (for example, Smith et al., 2005) have reported about perceived cultural distance, imagined distinctions between East Asian and Western teaching and learning practices. These are perceptions rather than objectively true but they reveal that what may have influenced the participants’ behaviour. In face-to-face settings, perceived cultural distances might be larger due to visible differences rather than invisible differences such as kiasu:

“You really don’t see them and maybe because of that you don’t see the tension, you don’t feel the tension like the Asian thing like I maybe could have had the thing if I saw a lot of British guys or British ladies sitting next to me, my classmates, it could be true”. (Emily, Malaysian-Chinese, female, 28 years)

Emily’s above comment is powerful as it suggests that she felt that students might treat her different in face-to-face settings when they could see from her physical appearance that she is East Asian. However, online, everyone cannot be seen and therefore, any cultural tensions can still be present, but are less visible. This could have positive implications for students because they may feel that studying online might level the playing field and result in being ‘othered’ less.

Once again, it is recognised that East Asian students are not a homogenous group but instead they are a collection of cultural groups who bear some similarities in terms of cultural values. Their experiences are still likely to vary hugely ‘within-group’. In actual

fact, from my interviews, I felt a sense that I was exposing what lies behind the cultural stereotypes of the quiet, passive East Asian student and instead found that many students enjoyed meeting face-to-face when presented with the opportunity:

“I really enjoy actually going into the classroom and meeting the tutor and fellow students face-to-face, that’s also very good because all other students are very knowledgeable and quite sensible as well, I get some kind of motivation from them”. (Anna, Japanese, female, 51 years)

Therefore, it is not necessarily that what might be witnessed as quiet or passive is the full picture. Students may really want to speak up or engage with others but there may be some difficulties as shown in Section 4.5.

The first theme of family values is closely connected to the second theme of ‘cultural bumps’. This sub-theme described kiasu (a culture-specific value) which Chinese students reported in my study. There is a clear link between culture-specific values and ‘cultural bumps’ as when these traits come with the individual to their learning process, they may experience clashes with what they have learned. Kiasu was shown to have both positive and negative outcomes for participants in my study as supported by the literature. The second theme, ‘cultural bumps’, will explore more examples of when cultures clash and what students do to overcome and cope.

4.5 Cultural bumps

The second theme uncovered is ‘cultural bumps’. The three related sub-themes are perceived cultural distance, benefits of intercultural learning and evolution of cultural identities.

4.5.1 Perceived cultural distance

The findings from this sub-theme help to address the main research question RQ1: ‘How do cultural differences shape students’ experiences of online and learning?’. This study has helped to shed light and even to a degree, expose the nature of cultural stereotypes and to move beyond them. The East Asian participants spoke of the way in which cultural

bumps could in the short-term affect them negatively but also that they seemed to grow through what they went through.

A key finding was that the participants reported perceiving subtle cultural distance. It was reported that some East Asian teaching and theories, for example Systems Thinking, were perceived to be different to Western teaching practices so far encountered. For instance, Charlie personally defined Systems Thinking as:

“We are all interconnected and whatever we do will have consequences and therefore we must 'listen' and give respect to our actions as it will affect everything else. There is sense of a circular effect - systemic in that sense” (Charlie, Kadazan, male, 61 years)

Charlie’s comment above is a simplified version of what Systems Thinking says but suggests that people being interdependent is key to some East Asian theories. This may have a knock-on effect in wider society as to why people behave the way they do. Within the limits of the current study, it was not possible to ask each student about their behaviour in every social situation. I was, however, able to learn more about what can happen when the knowledge a person previously held comes into conflict with new information or a new set of practices. The participants had highlighted cultural differences but implied that they were more nuanced.

Linked to this, participants felt that the East Asian style of teaching and learning might be to go deeper. Time was often expected to be able to process whereas a Western style of teaching and learning was perceived as being more surface level and more related to learning outcomes:

“Can I say that the Western way of learning is very much outcome based and tends to be more linear? There is no patience - if we can change our surroundings, we shape it” (Charlie, Kadazan, male, 61 years)

Of particular note was the final part of Charlie’s comment where he indicated that there may be more flexibility within East Asian teaching and learning whereas the Western way may have been faster but more at a surface level. Perceived cultural distance was also evident from other interviews where broad statements were made about how East Asian and Western teaching and learning might be perceived to differ for students. These mirrored Charlie’s view above that East Asian students, and in particular Chinese

students, might feel that a holistic view is needed where history is accounted for whereas a Western view might be of how more separated individuals are:

“Yeah I think the other thing I would say that the East and West are different, the West learning or thinking is somehow always in isolation, meaning when they look at a project, they only look at a project in isolation whereas the Chinese will see it in a context, it’s almost like horizontally and vertically so where does this fit in historical, historically and where does it fit in the context with neighbouring, surrounding and all that? So, this is something the Western thinking is lacking. So, they do things in a very dissected way, I can’t find any other word. We don’t see things as part of the bigger system” (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

This horizontal-vertical dichotomy might be an over-generalisation but perceived cultural distance might impact upon the students and make them act on their beliefs about being ‘different’:

“Yeah, I think the collective culture can be really suffocating although it’s viewed from the outside as very friendly and all that, there’s a lot of suffocation of individuals in the middle” (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

If students look at projects with one view, but encounter situations where another perspective is needed, they may feel confused or disadvantaged. When teaching practices in China and Japan as compared to the UK differ, some students might experience adverse emotional distress. Daniel’s use of words such as ‘they’ and ‘we’ highlights that he saw the East and West as distinct from one another in terms of how learning and thinking are perceived in different countries. There was also a prevailing belief that East Asian teaching practices might transmit ideas about the importance of maintaining group harmony and having respect, especially for perceived authority figures such as university staff. One example given was that in Japan, students may be taught that students are expected to be passive learners. This did not always marry up with the expectations of how Western universities operated:

“We Japanese students are accustomed with a learning style, sitting in class and listening to the teachers’ direction and little discussions in class compared with European class” (George, Japanese, male, 26 years)

This could have implications for the way in which university staff delivering online learning plan and deliver face-to-face or online tutorials. It may be that students holding Japanese identities find it more difficult to have discussions simply because this is not common practice in Japan compared with teaching in Western classrooms - online or

otherwise. It may be that students want the opportunity to be able to exchange ideas with staff and students but that they might find it hard to do so as it not their cultural norm to engage in this kind of dialogue.

George's experience was not an isolated incident but instead may have resonance for other Japanese students as I found in this study. There was further evidence of this in another interview with Anna where I heard a similar story. Anna told me that Japanese students were not encouraged to question and whilst it was permitted, there would be a set time for this rather than an open approach. Her interview provides further evidence that Japanese students may be disadvantaged in terms of their ability to participate in higher education due to cultural factors. The expected behaviour in Japan in education settings may differ from the behaviour expected by British online learning providers such as The Digital University:

"If you are a student and if it was in Japan then you would normally just participate by listening, you don't normally say what you think so questions, asking questions that sort of thing doesn't really happen so it's all like listen to the tutor carefully and then maybe you could ask at the end some questions but more when you are asked rather than freely asked questions. So that is quite a major difference. I sometimes struggle to participate, tutorial or whatever" (Anna, Japanese, female, 51 years)

Having clear opportunities to ask questions might be helpful for students similar to George and Anna who had been faced with this unexpected difference. The above finding of perceiving cultural distance was not only reported by Japanese students but extended to Chinese students as Holly commented here:

"Usually in China, it is one teacher with a lot of students so it's very teacher-centred lecturing styles, limited interaction patterns while as far as I know in Western cultures from primary school to high schools, the numbers are definitely lower than in China so students get more opportunity. Growing up, I didn't really participate in teacher's questions or groupwork or teamwork outside of the classroom, it had always been inside the classroom" (Holly, Chinese, female, 27 years)

As Holly suggested, based on her experience of learning in a Chinese classroom, she had not been as familiar with having a lot of interaction with the teacher and her peers. She had also not had to work with groups and a lot of the teaching took place within the class itself. This has resonance with other students such as the experiences of George which show that prior expectations of teacher-student interactions might have a bearing on

future behaviour. It is unclear whether the onus is on university staff to reasonably adjust their teaching practice or whether the student should be expected to adapt their ways of studying or whether a blend of these two suggestions would ultimately help the student the most (for more discussion of the implications for professional practice, see Section 6.2). However, the students' experiences could be shaped positively and negatively therefore the findings from my interviews relating to this sub-theme help with addressing the main research question.

Additionally, this sub-theme helps to explore the third sub- research question: 'In what ways does a student's cultural identity present barriers to participation in online learning?'. By identifying what the barriers are, a more inclusive approach to teaching and learning can be taken and ultimately this benefits all – staff, students and the institution. This sub-theme of perceived cultural distance helps to illuminate what barriers to participation might exist if students do not successfully transition to being taught in a different culture to the culture that they identify with. One example of this might be the perception of a student's language competence.

Having illuminated a potential barrier, it is now necessary to consider what could help level the playing field or to consider what may be advantageous for students holding different cultural identities. From the interviews, having the ability to speak and understand English competently was commonly found to be viewed as an advantage. Language can be used to differentiate between different groups and often has been used as a way to create in-groups and out-groups. In other words, language is a socially constructed barrier. Daniel alluded to the fact that English is my first language which in his view, may have made life easier for me compared to him:

"The default setting in people's brains is if you are not one of us, you look different, you don't speak our language, therefore you don't understand our way. If by any chance they work out that you do speak English or in your case just like everyone else, that barrier can be lowered and eased" (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

The students did not report having problems with conversing or comprehending others during online interactions. However, the style of academic writing required for essays was found to be difficult to adopt at times. This is a pertinent issue, especially for institutions offering online learning where written assignments, written feedback and

correspondence tuition through e-mails is the main way that tutors and students communicate. Imogen's comment has been selected to pick up on this point about essay-writing being one of the 'cultural bumps' experienced by online learners:

"Yeah talking of the barrier I mentioned earlier - English. Sometimes conversation is not a big problem I think but writing the academic report or essay, sometimes I think it's really difficult" (Imogen, Japanese, female, 46 years)

Imogen sees the language itself as a barrier, as well as the academic conventions. Of interest, less visible barriers were also mentioned in the interviews, such as the East Asian trait of enjoying more time to process and reflect. This could sometimes be experienced as an unintentional and potentially difficult to prevent barrier:

"When you hesitate maybe one second or something and another person would say something else so you lose your sort of opportunity" (Anna, Japanese, female, 51 years)

While their Western counterparts may find it easier to 'jump in' or be bolder in presenting a response, East Asian students such as Anna, who was bringing with her a Japanese cultural perspective to her studies, sometimes felt limited in interactions. She wanted to have time to process but then may have been excluded. Other participants' stories resonated with this mismatch of efficiency and the need to take a slower pace. This could impact upon study behaviours such as note-taking:

"I am more of a listener as I am slow on my reading usually. I want to read and make personal notes on everything...learning should be deep within and you must experience from inside" (Charlie, Kadazan, male, 61 years)

This is aligned to the literature which suggested that there may be perceived cultural distance between East Asian and Western teaching and learning practices such as whether the aim was to achieve deep or surface learning. The potential issue for aiming for deep learning, not uncommon amongst East Asian students, and such a rigorous approach would be that there may not be enough time for the student to make such detailed notes. This could impact upon their ability to get drafts done.

In terms of cultural differences in the delivery of materials, a pertinent point raised was that university staff sometimes used phrases that were specific to the Western culture in which they were teaching. This could exclude students who were not familiar with the

references. Frankie explained differences such as this:

“Your culture spills out onto everything that you say and you do, small little references, phrases that you use, references to pop culture, all those kinds of things, they come out, even if you don’t mean them to. Those kinds of things will get lost on foreign students. If I think back, I said my biggest culture shock was coming to the UK, one of the things I found very difficult is people assumed that I would get all these pop culture references, you know like going back to TV shows, I have no idea what you’re talking about, I’ve never seen those TV programmes”
(Frankie, mixed, male, 39 years)

As Frankie showed, it is not only the change in teaching practices, no matter how small or subtle, but also the content of the teaching that can exclude students holding different cultural identities. Whilst it would be practically impossible to have comprehensive knowledge of every culture and country in the world – ensuring that staff have some knowledge of ‘cultural bumps’ would benefit both staff and students and be a more inclusive way to teach all. It is interesting that Frankie used the word ‘spills out’. From this, I inferred that even when this is unintentional, the students do notice it and may not understand such local references.

This second theme of ‘cultural bumps’ and in particular, this sub-theme of perceived cultural distance closely relates to family values. It may be that how families transmit certain values is what underpins the difficulties that students encounter. It is hard to completely separate out family values from ‘cultural bumps’ as they are associated with one another.

Furthermore, ‘cultural bumps’ and more specifically, the sub-theme of perceived cultural distance is related to the third theme of sources of motivation and the staff who may support students holding different cultural identities. Cultural differences can be minimised and reduced when people around the student help. Additionally, when the students themselves take steps to ensure that the ‘cultural bumps’ do not become larger issues such as non-participation or drop-out.

4.5.2 Benefits of intercultural learning

The findings from this sub-theme help to address the main research question RQ1: 'How do cultural differences shape students' experiences of online learning?'. In particular, this sub-theme helps shed light on what can be learnt from the module, not just in terms of content, but in terms of other benefits and insight into what it means to be 'British':

"I think it's quite a good window in to understand how British people think"
(Daniel, British Chinese, male, 44 years)

One benefit of intercultural learning was that learning more about Western culture during a module could help students to learn more about particular aspects of it such as religion. The participants spoke of unexpected benefits of intercultural learning such as an English module teaching students about subject matter as well as opening their eyes to other elements of culture such as Christianity and the key underlying principles:

"I think more or less all of the stuff we were studying was requiring some knowledge about Christianity and so I had to really study and also get the sense of it by actually starting to go to church" (Anna, Japanese, female, 51 years)

As shown by the above, learning more about a religion was a by-product of the content of the module for this particular participant. It may be encouraging for students to take a more holistic view of learning. This is because the knowledge they gain on the module may extend beyond knowledge of a subject, but also to an increased understanding of Western culture.

The findings from this sub-theme are also directly related to the second sub- research question: 'In what ways does a student's cultural identity present benefits to participation in online learning?'. Holly's interview later corroborated that there are definite benefits to studying between cultures despite being on a different module and a different Master's degree programme. She also highlighted that it was a strength to have modules in which different cultures, for instance, Chinese cultures were used as examples. Diversifying the curriculum and designing it to be more inclusive may help students holding different cultural identities who otherwise may feel as though local references are lost on them. This mirrors the findings outlined in Section 4.5.1 previously about perceived cultural distance. It can help when the authors have knowledge of the culture themselves, it can help to minimise perceived barriers to understanding the module materials. Holly told me:

“Some articles are written by Chinese people and there are some studies in the Chinese neighbourhood education settings so I don’t feel the cultural barrier with the materials” (Holly, Chinese, female, 27 years)

In keeping with this sub-themes focus on the benefits of intercultural learning, participants attributed The Digital University with the way in which they approached learning changing for the better. In one case, Daniel had previously felt that his original approach to learning had been time-consuming but through studying with The Digital University, he was able to improve his approach to learning. In essence, Daniel had fused his approaches to learning:

“The Chinese approach to learning is word by word and it took me forever...my cultural identity, cultural perspective, perception dictated the way I learnt in the early years. Only through learning with The Digital University that shaped and changed my learning view” (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

In other words, Daniel had noticed that his previous cultural identity was at odds with the way he was expected to take on new information and was impacting upon the time it was taking him to process and write. Therefore, by studying in a Western culture in an online learning university, he was able to create a new way of learning.

The findings from my study reveal that identities cannot only be constructed by the individual (the students) but there were concerns that identities could be imposed upon them by others such as staff. The students spoke openly about how they had changed their own labels when they had to but that contrary to what others may think, they did not have overt problems with language. This is not to say that other students do not have these issues just that maybe for online learning, there might be other psychological barriers such as wondering whether university staff labels the student as ‘international’, ‘different’ or ‘unable to speak English’. This barrier or imposition of a label may in fact be more damaging to the students’ perception of themselves as they may feel inferior to their ‘home student’ counterparts.

This theme of ‘cultural bumps’ and more specifically, benefits of intercultural learning relates closely to the two other main themes (see Sections 4.4 and 4.6 respectively). What was found regarding the benefits of intercultural learning has added new knowledge to what is known about East Asian postgraduate online learners and takes a positive approach or outlook rather than the stereotypes of the struggling international student. Instead, by revealing more about the perceived benefits of intercultural learning, this can

tell us more about how what knowledge a student comes with impacts upon and positively shapes their studies.

Furthermore, the benefits of intercultural learning tells us much about the third theme: sources of motivation. This study has helped give the ten students a voice and in doing so, they are giving a voice to other students like them. By knowing that it is not all bleak for students, that the students themselves can actually highlight benefits of intercultural learning, this knowledge can be shared for the benefit of education professionals too who can better provide for students holding different cultural identities. In addition, it may be useful for those around the student such as their peers to know that there are benefits and to help draw these out.

4.5.3 Evolution of cultural identities

The findings from this sub-theme help to address the main research question RQ1: ‘How do cultural differences shape students’ experiences of online learning?’. It was found that creating a hybrid cultural identity helped some participants cope with their experiences of online learning. The creation of a hybrid cultural identity was not always an easy task and, in some cases, happened over the course of many years. The result of negotiating cultural identities even if this process had taken place before a participant studied at The Digital University could be either a better or worse student experience. I found this to be more complex than I had anticipated from the literature.

The findings from this sub-theme are also directly related to the second sub- research question: ‘In what ways does a student’s cultural identity present benefits to participation in online learning?’. As mentioned above, from carrying out the interviews, this theme of evolution of cultural identities has revealed more about how the participants’ experiences can be influenced by these.

Imogen alluded to some problems earlier in her life as she had lived in the UK but mentioned that these difficulties were only temporary, not long-lasting. She had grappled with her identity but eventually now feels that in some ways her identity has become more aligned with a UK identity:

“For me, I’m a typical Japanese but after the experience [of] 2 years in UK, it’s changed a bit for my identity...There are lots of amazing things about the

differences. Yeah, my identity has been changed a bit, not half like you, but some part of my identity can be said to be more UK or European” (Imogen, Japanese, female, 46 years)

It may be that identity changes occur while a student is engaging with the new culture and the new university and therefore staff may want to be more informed about the different ways that this can be experienced. From my own interviews, it is suggested that in the beginning, ‘cultural bumps’ may be hard for the student but that with the right support and due to the learner’s own commitment to creating a cultural identity or negotiating their own, this does not have to be long-term.

Finally, this sub-theme helps to explore the third sub- research question: ‘In what ways does a student’s cultural identity present barriers to participation in online learning?’. As mentioned above, from carrying out the interviews, this theme of evolution of cultural identities has revealed more about how the participants’ experiences can be influenced by these.

One finding was that the East Asian participants perceived their cultural identity to be fluid rather than fixed. Their cultural identity had changed several times over the years depending on where the participant had lived, studied and their acculturation processes at the time. It was not always easy for a participant to negotiate their cultural identity but many created a hybrid cultural identity in order to cope. Daniel expressed that he enjoyed being more ‘*at peace*’ with his own cultural identity now:

“So, from leaving China to coming to this country new. Where am I? In terms of sort of fitting in with the British culture or should I leave all of mine behind? ...It has been a painful process at times [but] I came at peace with that and hold them together very well now” (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

Daniel’s cultural identity had therefore evolved once he had moved to Britain and he spoke of how it was difficult to fit in and called it ‘*painful*’ but ultimately the process led him to ‘*peace*’. He had been able to be proud of who he was rather than feel the need to hide elements of his cultural identity and his origins. He continued to tell me:

“Now I’m very comfortable with who I am. In fact, when I go to places, I actually introduce myself as ‘Made in China’, many of the good things in the world now are ‘Made in China’. I think it does make people laugh. I’ve kind of reached that place whereas before I was trying to hide like you said to be part of what I’m actually not and now I’ve reached a place where I am comfortable, this is who I am, I am both” (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

There may be many different coping strategies employed by students who transition between cultures. I enjoyed hearing Daniel's honest view but also his sense of humour may well have been a buffer and a way to introduce his cultural identity to people he meets day-to-day now that he is much more comfortable with who he is. This was a difficult part of the interview and following on from ethical considerations and points I made in Section 3.10 about the need to look inward and be reflexive, at this point of the interview, it reminded me of my own father and the way that he taught me to answer people if they were asking about our cultural identity but were not doing so in a kind way. If people asked, 'Where are you from?' in a pointed way, my father taught me that I could reply with a simple 'From Mars, I am a Martian. Where are you from?'. This resonance about coping behaviours has been discussed in more depth in Section 6.4 where the limitations are laid out. It is both a strength and a limit to feel commonality between the researcher and the researched.

A further point which was raised regarding the process of creating new hybrid cultural identities through acculturation was that by seeking out others with similar cultural backgrounds, this could delay or prevent integration into the new culture:

"For me, I can equally see that for a lot of the Chinese people, they like to huddle together to seek their kind of safety, security but unwillingly that stops them from integrating into English culture and that can create a lot of misunderstanding when you're going to be put into the box" (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

Daniel's comment highlights how some students felt that they could be included into their former cultural identity group if they found it hard to fully integrate with their Western counterparts. This prompts thinking about how to help East Asian postgraduates feel fully integrated into their university communities and perhaps peer mentoring programmes, not just from East Asian students, but from experienced students on their modules could be a way to mitigate this potential issue.

This theme of cultural bumps and more specifically, evolution of cultural identities relates closely to the first theme of family values because where the student has started out in life can greatly shape the experiences they have later in life.

4.6 Sources of motivation

The third theme which emerged is sources of motivation. The main sub-theme is related to where motivation comes from: staff support. The data showed who can buffer against negative feelings such as stress, anxiety and low mood which helped with answering the main research question: 'RQ1: 'How do cultural differences shape students' experiences of online learning?'. This finding that staff helped the participants also accounts for positive factors over and above family support. This theme also explicitly explores the fourth sub- research question: 'In what ways can students be more effectively supported whilst engaged with online learning?'. This theme revealed different avenues of support for the students over and above that which is offered by their families.

4.6.1 Staff support

Firstly, in terms of support from staff, the participants reported that they expected a higher amount of pastoral support and motivation than they would expect had they enrolled in a brick university. This is in part because of by-products of online learning such as students spending more time on their own and possibly feeling more isolated in their study journey. Participants also spoke of being 'doubly stressed' or working 'double-time' as opposed to part-time:

"I like that they're kind of challenging but on the other hand, they're understanding, especially if you work. I'm not a typical student, I'm working. It's challenging enough and you have a double stress with studies, you're not motivated to continue so that's why I like the liberty" (Jessica, Chinese-Austrian, female, 36 years)

This language suggests that the participants did not feel that being part-time students made it easier. Secondly, participants had expectations of feedback being specific rather than generic comments. They appreciated the staff supporting them despite never meeting them in person. One-to-one support was reportedly more beneficial than group situations, because it removes the energy expended on attempts to maintain group harmony. The resounding view was that university staff who were genuinely understanding was helpful for motivating students to continue.

It is acknowledged that both the academic support that staff can provide and the pastoral and emotional support are needed in order for East Asian postgraduates to be successful. There is a recognition that the postgraduate experience means that the student cannot dedicate all of their time to one module and so they might utilise more time management and life management skills than undergraduates, for instance. This might further explain why The Digital University is often seen as a good option for students, from any background, who need the freedom and flexibility that online learning provides. The language used by East Asian students is telling and will be discussed further in Chapter 5: Discussion in relation to the previous literature. It may be that the benefits and barriers posed to East Asian students in particular might be different in that they have different expectations of the staff supporting them. Implications for staff and students and how to manage these could be important for staff development and students' personal development (see Section 6.2).

A further finding about staff support was that the students enjoyed receiving feedback that was specific rather than general in order for them to be able to achieve their best:

"Yeah his feedback's always very specific ... I don't really have to clarify too much but I'm sure I have asked some further questions" (Anna, Japanese, female, 51 years)

It is expected that many students would benefit from specific, personalised feedback. However, some literature would suggest that East Asian students may especially find it more useful to work in concrete terms rather than the abstract, although this may depend on the topic being taught. Some subjects lend themselves more easily to being taught in a theoretical way, for example mathematics or physics. In addition, it has been suggested previously that East Asian students may not be as forthcoming with further questions due to their deference to authority:

"In terms of tutor feedback, Asian students might not want to ask clarification questions if they don't understand the comments, this is particularly relating to the don't want to offend so that means they never fully understood what it meant" (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

This barrier experienced by participants of not wanting to 'bother the tutor' or 'offend the tutor' might be inadvertently meaning that they receive less support than students who are more willing to engage in a longer term back and forth discussion. This highlights that

the role of university staff who are delivering online learning may be slightly different to the role of university staff at brick universities. Whether this is universal or more expected from East Asian students will be discussed in Chapter 5: Discussion. Students may perceive staff to be more approachable in some ways. On the note of accessibility, the East Asian students seem to value 1:1 support and sometimes preferred this to group tutorials:

“I don’t know if it’s possible but I think there could be at least two individual talks with the tutor per module because so far it has been tutorial but tutorials are with a lot of students...1:1 Skype talk would be good” (Holly, Chinese, female, 27 years)

At the Digital University, 1:1 additional support sessions with a student’s own tutor or a different tutor can be requested but this comment may highlight that not all students are aware of this. These individualised sessions might help with another barrier highlighted by students, namely particular confusion when staff may expect a student to shift from the academic style to a more reflective style. This has links to perceived cultural distance but was raised as a way in which staff might better support them:

“Sometimes they ask you don’t use ‘I’ as you are writing, sometimes you are asked to use ‘I’ so that kind of language and culture-related issue can be really confusing to students” (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

Using the first- or third-person narrative might not seem to be a big ask but for a student from a different background where they might be less used to switching between being critical and then being reflexive, this could cause some confusion. However, an education professional could help make this clear as could academic and professional development. In other interviews, a similar view was taken, that a caring education professional was perceived to be of more value than the marks they attained:

“It’s not about marks though. It’s just a sense that the tutor cares. You can also see this during online tutorials and looking at the materials they present. It’s this feeling like ‘wow’ she really puts heart into it” (Charlie, Kadazan, male, 61 years)

Despite perceptions of online learning meaning that a student may lose elements such as getting to know the tutor, comments such as this show that it is still possible to gain a good sense of a tutor who puts their heart and soul into their teaching. It may be that specific groups prefer this mode of working and like that they do not have to interact face-to-face as much.

Another interesting finding related to this was that participants did not always feel that educators in their former schools in different cultures had suited them. This goes against the misconception that there are absolute distinct cultures and ways of learning that all within a cultural group may find easier to follow. It may be that some individuals within East Asian cultures find some elements easier to adapt to or in some cases easier to get the best out of them compared to in East Asian schools:

“I think the schooling in China didn’t fit me so the most interesting thing is I actually never passed one English exam at school. It’s only later on at English school, somehow the teacher there sort of identified a way to really get the best out of me” (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

In summary, this section has shown that challenging and supportive university staff who give students specific feedback and offer 1:1 support can be motivating, particularly for East Asian students.

4.7 Summary

In summary, this chapter has described how the three themes: family values, ‘cultural bumps’ and sources of motivation arose from the data to answer the main research questions and research sub-questions.

Family Values

The first theme, family values, was combined from the smaller sub-themes of parental influence and kiasuism. It was shown that culture as represented by the values passed on from the students’ parents or transmitted through East Asian society previously was very important. The students believed that their cultural heritage and the values had had a lasting impact on them and affected how they felt when they engaged with other cultures such as British culture through education and teaching practices. Linked to this, it was highlighted that parents were influential in determining what careers were deemed to be seen as acceptable and this may have interacted with both the student’s East Asian cultural identity but also their gender identity. At a surface level, this may come as no surprise and parents looking out for their children’s best interests are likely to be universal but what is interest is the perception of certain career pathways as more

suitable than others in East Asian families. Parents can have a positive influence on their children and steer them towards degrees which may open up more doors and have a higher earning potential, but with that may also come the pressure to succeed and fear of failure. Linked to parental influence was culture-specific values and the one which most came to the fore was kiasu – the strong will to succeed and win. Kiasu was ingrained within Chinese cultures but more research may be needed to understand how this affects online learners engaging with Western higher education. In the online classroom, kiasu-like behaviours might be perceived one of two ways: the hardworking, ambitious student set against the competitive, passive student avoiding shame, which may translate to lower levels of participation or interaction.

Cultural Bumps

The second theme, ‘cultural bumps’, was combined from the smaller sub-themes of perceived cultural distance, benefits of intercultural learning and evolution of cultural identities. It was shown that contrary to some cultural stereotypes, not all East Asian participants struggled with English ability or experienced severe culture shock. In fact, more evidence from the interview data suggested that the participants whilst initially experiencing distress at the outset of the studies were able to grow in resilience and confidence and even merge their cultural identities to help them thrive in the HE online environment. Whether actual differences in East Asian and Western teaching practices exist is up for considerable debate, however my study has suggested that the perceived cultural distance experienced by online learners is key as minimal distance generally led to a more positive experience. Greater distance, not helped by local references instead of global references being used, can be perceived but may be socially co-constructed by both educator and student. This raises important questions about how to improve inclusivity in the online classroom (see Section 6.2 for a deeper discussion about the wider implications of the study). In addition, it was also revealed that the online HE curriculum itself can introduce students with different cultural identities to a particular culture, for example, British culture. Elements such as religion or increased expectation of criticality rather than rote learning could help the students improve their cultural competence and improve their educational success as they gained more knowledge of other cultures. Lastly, the process of creating a hybrid cultural identity to merge, hold onto and let go of parts of their personal histories helped the students to cope and to

transition fully. This was not a quick process but appeared to help students have a better experience with online learning. Once the student had acculturated, this later helped them to feel more integrated into their module and the wider Digital University postgraduate community. If a student was constructing their new cultural identity while engaging with online learning, this might be quite painful. This links to the third theme about how best to support students undergoing difficult periods of transformation.

Sources of Motivation

The third theme, sources of motivation, consisted of one large sub-theme of staff support. Two other notable sources of motivation could be from parents (as discussed fully in Section 4.4 and 4.5) as well as possibly the individual learner personality. In other words, the student's own drives and ambitious tendencies could help them to keep self-motivated. However, other people could help to push them when they might have not otherwise felt able to (as discussed in Section 4.6). Educators can help buffer against feelings that arise during periods of acculturation and transition such as anxiety. It was shown that students do feel able to talk to staff and value what they might be able to add to their online learning experiences. In turn, they were often proactive in setting up study groups and, whilst they did not always enjoy small talk or the volume of posts on online discussion threads in the modules, they did benefit from having the ability to check in with others to feel less alone in their studies. Next, Chapter 5 will present a critical discussion of the data and findings in my own study as compared with findings from the previous literature.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss how my research findings, which emerged from the interview data, correspond with the findings from the previous literature in the fields of acculturation, international student support and motivation. As in Chapter 4, my research findings are presented using a selection of the participants' own comments to allow their voices to come to the fore. The participants were East Asian postgraduates therefore 'students' below refers to their experiences rather than *all* students although the contribution to educational theory is explored in the final section (Section 5.5). I have framed the next three sections around the four research sub-questions to ensure that they have been answered:

- 'What factors may shape students' decisions to engage with online learning?' (see Section 5.2)
- 'In what ways does a cultural identity present benefits to participation in online learning?' (see Section 5.3)
- 'In what ways does a cultural identity present barriers to participation in online learning?' (see Section 5.3)
- 'In what ways can students be more effectively supported whilst engaged with online learning?' (see Section 5.4)

5.2 The factors that shape East Asian postgraduate students' decisions to engage with online learning

5.2.1 Parental influence

Participants in my research study reported that family values which they inherited from their parents were very important. Parents placed great emphasis on the need to achieve highly in education and held it in high regard. Whether 'true' or not, the participants *perceived* that this need to achieve was more than simply parents wanting their children to do well but instead felt that it had cultural roots. The participants suggested that this might be more prevalent in East Asian upbringings than in the West. In Section 4.4.1, I had evidenced this finding using a powerful comment from Emily:

“I always think that from our background, like your growing up background, you always have to compete with others and your parents always want you to be the best of the best and when I see the Western culture, it’s totally different” (Emily, Malaysian-Chinese, female, 28 years)

This finding that East Asian participants might have been influenced by their parents to compete and place pressure on excelling is not uncommon and is reflected throughout the literature (Phillipson, 2013; Siu, 1992). More specifically, this finding corresponds with the findings of Balestrini and Stoeger (2018) which I introduced in Section 2.5. What I found under the theme ‘parental influence’ bears resemblance to the phenomenon in their study which has been termed a ‘Special Cultural Emphasis on Learning and Education’ (SCELE). The authors had wanted to explore whether SCELE originated within East Asian cultures. From their analysis of media texts pertaining to school-related news in the United States and in East Asia, they found evidence of what others had reported anecdotally. They found that words reported which were focussed upon learning and education were 1.86 times more prevalent in East Asia than in the United States. They also found that SCELE in East Asia exceeds the emphasis placed on education in the West. This therefore supports the participants’ views in my study that East Asian cultures and East Asian parents may play a role in passing on this increased focus on high achievement in education to their adult children.

Having begun with the broad and the macro-level comparisons to the work of Balestrini and Stoeger (2018), this part moves to the more specific family values that my participants reported during the interviews. One specific family value that parents passed on to the participants was the idea that certain subjects and careers were deemed acceptable, particularly in East Asian culture. Sometimes this family value was welcome, viewed as positive and had shaped the participants’ lifelong ambitions. However, in other cases, this could be constraining and have negative implications for the participant when they did not feel like they belonged on that particular path. The participants commented that common careers perceived by East Asian parents as desirable included the following:

“You can do what you want as long as it’s medicine, law, dentistry or accountancy (laughs)” (Brad, Scottish-born Chinese, male, 36 years).

There were echoes between the interviews about the subjects that were seen as preferred by parents. The higher tier of careers which parents would be happy for their adult children to pursue included the above, for example, medicine or law. A lower tier

might include charitable work or professions with lower financial rewards. One participant commented about the East Asian perspective on desirable career tiers that I have described:

“There is this kind of legitimate, recognised profession but there’s also this kind of Mickey Mouse or Playboy profession. From an Asian perspective” (Daniel, British Chinese, male, 44 years).

This finding from my research study that parent and adult children’s perspectives might not always match is supported in the literature. More specifically, this finding is consistent with the findings of Cheong et al. (2018). In my study, almost all of the participants mentioned that their parents had helped influence their choice of discipline and career path. Cheong et al. (2018) found similar; 58 per cent of the 40 students in their focus group study reported that their parents had helped them choose which higher education institution to attend. In addition, they also found that 31 parents responded to their questionnaire and viewed foreign higher education institutions as prestigious but their adult children did not always agree. In my own study, I had found that participants viewed flexibility as an important factor in their careers so that they could pursue multiple jobs and have freedom to switch careers later if they wanted to. It remains unclear whether this is unique to the postgraduates I spoke to or if it may be complicated as they were online learners and part-time learners, both of which might value flexibility aside from cultural factors. Nevertheless, my findings appear to be supported by Cheong et al.’s (2018) findings as in their study, parents had framed future careers in terms of those which would be permanent and in need of ‘hard skills’, whereas their adult children valued ‘soft skills’ and transferability.

Having evidenced my findings about parents and their influence over their adult children in terms of having clear ideas about desirable careers, this next part compares my own findings with Kindt’s (2018). This illustrates some ways in which my own research study’s findings diverges from their study. Participants in my study reported that they had to deconstruct their cultural identities and sometimes reconstruct new hybrid cultural identities to help them move on. This was sometimes the result of being pushed and in the most extreme case, one participant felt that she did not want the pressure:

“That’s one of the reasons that I split up from my family. I made the choice that I don’t want the pressure, I want to live my life. I’m still continuing to get rid of this

imprint from the family, to be the best. Because when I grow up, the only thing I get the feeling of is I'm a machine, I'm not a human being, I'm a machine" (Jessica, Chinese-Austrian, female, 36 years).

The finding that some adult children never feel pushed by their immigrant parents, a finding from Kindt's (2018) work with children of immigrants in Norway, directly contrasts with what I found. Contrary to my finding that the participants felt that their parents had had a lasting, often positive, strong underlying influence on their career choices, Kindt's (2018) work found that the adult children said they had always loved the subjects that they chose. They indicated that they were autonomous in their decisions and the 'true' reason for selecting a subject was their own individual interest. Children of immigrant parents may feel stigmatised by being part of a minoritized group and therefore choose a prestigious subject or institution in order to gain acceptance from others. This interpretation from my data is supported by Kindt's (2018) discussion, even if our findings are different. I would argue that parents are influential over their adult children's career decisions and that it may be particularly evident in East Asian cultures. My study extends Kindt's (2018) study and addresses their failure to recognise the cultural differences within cultures. In addition to parental influence, kiasuism was also found to emerge as important in shaping East Asian postgraduates' decision to engage with online learning. In Section 5.2.2, kiasuism as described in my study by my participants will be compared and contrasted to the scant literature in this area.

5.2.2 Kiasuism

Kiasu had emerged from the interviews as a culture-specific value which particularly impacted upon how East Asian postgraduates behaved in the online classroom. As a reminder, kiasu is characterised by the fear of not succeeding. The participants, particularly those with Chinese heritage, had felt that kiasuism could explain some of their behaviour but ultimately did not feel that it was always a negative value to have inherited. Instead, they reported that it made them hardworking, ambitious and commented that a healthy level of competition with themselves was quite helpful in many cases, to help them achieve. In Chapter 4, I had explained that kiasu had links to national identity, as evidenced by the following comment from Emily:

“There’s something called kiasu, it’s something in Hokkien if I’m not mistaken, they don’t like to lose anything. They tend not to lose in any kind of decisions, any kind of competitions. That kind of thing is the same across Asia... we [Malaysian-Chinese people] have the mindset that we have to fight for what we want... the Westernised culture is like yeah you do whatever you like” (Emily, Malaysian-Chinese, female, 28 years)

Of particular note is that the above comment could be seen to illustrate that Chinese students may feel in competition with themselves or others which may be the underlying driver, as well as an added pressure perhaps, for their success. The participants holding Chinese cultural identities thought that kiasuism was a culture-specific trait which in their view was not shared by people with Western cultural identities. It can be motivational but if not appropriately channelled, could alter others’ perceptions of them. This finding that kiasu pervades within East Asian cultures and might underly competitive behaviour in online classrooms is scant in the previous literature and may help to add new thinking to the field. From reviewing the literature, this finding is comparable to the findings of Bedford and Chua’s (2018) research study, although there are very few studies which have explicitly looked at the impact of kiasu on higher education experiences. To my knowledge, this study may be one of the first in a UK higher education context. Their study’s findings included evidence of two mindsets linked to kiasu. These were that students did not want to miss out on any opportunities and furthermore, they did not want to fall behind others academically. In my own study, there was a sense of urgency about pursuing postgraduate degrees, as evidenced by this additional comment from Emily:

“Asians tend to start Master’s quite young at a really young age compared to the Caucasians so like all my other high school mates especially those studying in Taiwan, they would continue their Master’s degree when they actually finished their undergrad” (Emily, Malaysian-Chinese, female, 28 years)

Whilst this did not explicitly mention kiasuism, this is aligned to my interpretation that kiasuism may underly this objective to start Master’s degrees at a younger age so that they would not miss out on opportunities or fall behind others. In other words, the participants may fear losing not just when compared with their peers but may act in order to avoid feelings of failure. Whilst comparison can be a thief of joy, it might be that some positive comparison is not always negative for East Asian students and that they might find that they thrive due to this need to be competitive. The fighting spirit which comes

from having a positive kiasu mindset may be helpful for students but my argument is that it may be a blessing and a curse. If this mindset is not appropriately managed and if students do not have sufficient support to reassure them that they are meeting expectations and that their best is enough, this could negatively affect their psychological well-being. From my interviews with participants other than with Emily, my interpretation was that the participants were reporting not only an external competitiveness but that kiasu may well instil a need to be internally competitive, in other words, to be competitive with themselves (see Brad's comments in Chapter 4).

Another finding from my own research study resembles Bedford and Chua's (2018) findings. The examples of kiasuism in my study hinted at comparison but did not distinguish between positive or negative kiasuism indicating that there might be a single category of kiasuism. This, as with Bedford and Chua's (2018) findings, refutes the earlier finding from Hwang et al.'s (2002) study which indicated that there were two categories: positive kiasuism and negative kiasuism. My own study's findings also contrast with Hwang et al.'s (2002) study in another way. They found that kiasu-positive students would seek more feedback in and out of class whereas I did not explicitly ask about this area. My idea that kiasuism may be a trait or could even be considered an internal, not just an external, competitive drive is similar to Bedford and Chua's (2018) assertion. They also argue that a cognitive aspect, as opposed to only a behavioural aspect, to kiasuism is needed when measuring it. Additionally, my interpretation of kiasu impacting upon how participants felt about their achievements and their self-worth is similar to Bedford and Chua's (2018) assertion that 'face-saving' is involved. This is when students want to perceive themselves to be achieving and need social validation. Section 5.3 now sets out the findings which addressed the next two research sub-questions. These relate to the benefits and barriers to participation for East Asian online learners.

5.3 The ways in which an East Asian cultural identity presents benefits and barriers to participation for online learners

This section relates to answering the second and third research sub-questions: 'In what ways does a student's cultural identity present benefits to participation in online

learning?’ and ‘In what ways does a student’s cultural identity present barriers to participation in online learning?’.

The findings in this section are crucial to fully realising how others might be able to remove barriers to participation and continue to share good practice. The findings discussed in this section are the most pertinent for postgraduates and add original thinking to the field which has mostly focussed upon either the experiences of sojourners or students physically moving to study (Ahmad et al., 2017; Busher et al., 2016). This research study has helped to fill the existing gap for studies which explore the benefits and barriers to participation which may persist for East Asian postgraduate online learners. More specifically, I believe that I have uncovered ‘cultural bumps’, the specific social and psychological challenges that are less visible online for students holding different cultural identities. However, I strongly argue that they are by no means less important than the challenges that have been introduced as ‘culture shock’ which result from physical and geographical transitions. As a reminder, for me, an example of traditional culture shock might be a student not finding it easy to converse in English or getting used to the way in which others may dress or have different social mores to those that they are used to. I propose that ‘cultural bumps’ are not the same as culture shock but are challenges in their own right. These may be subtler such as not being familiar with Western academic conventions (for example, critical writing) or being encouraged to be independent rather than interdependent when undertaking projects.

The findings from my own research study have been compared and contrasted with findings from the literature such as Lysgaard’s (1955) model of sociocultural adjustment; Tajfel and Turner’s (2004) Social Identity Theory and Berry’s (1980) seminal work.

5.3.1 Perceived cultural distance

I did not find evidence to suggest that East Asian postgraduates struggle severely with traditional culture shock. Furthermore, I did not find that my participants’ English ability (in terms of language comprehension) alone was a strong factor in deciding how satisfied they were with their experiences of online learning. My findings support the idea that students can feel ‘othered’ by how they look and that there tends to be a preconception

that international students will struggle to comprehend or converse in English, as shown by Daniel's comment:

"The default setting in people's brains is if you are not one of us, you look different, you don't speak our language, therefore you don't understand our way. If by any chance they work out that you do speak English or in your case just like everyone else, that barrier can be lowered and eased" (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

Therefore, Daniel's comment above illustrates one of the first main findings which address the research sub-questions which ask what the benefits and barriers for students with East Asian cultural identities might be. This was the finding that the perceived cultural differences are less visible and more nuanced than traditional culture shock suggested and may well refer to the conventions required by Western higher education, rather than language ability. Therefore, the findings of my research study can be contrasted with Lysgaard's (1955) model of sociocultural adjustment. My participants reported there was no experience of what Lysgaard termed the 'honeymoon period' which was described as when students enjoy the novel aspects of moving to a new country. In my study, not all students were living in the UK due to the online nature of their degree so there was not the experience of physical transition that I had read about in the sojourner literature. However, there are similarities between the middle two stages of Lysgaard's (1955) model, namely 'crisis' and 'adjustment' and the findings which emerged from my study. For Lysgaard, these stages were characterised by feelings of loneliness and confusion but then adjustment would enable the student to have a better experience due to several adaptations. I found evidence of this; participants reported occasions when they had felt out of their depth and found aspects of Western culture difficult to negotiate. This might include being asked for a prompt reply when they would like to have more time to reflect as shown by the following comment:

"When you hesitate maybe one second or something and another person would say something else so you lose your sort of opportunity" (Anna, Japanese, female, 51 years)

In context, it was not purely about any student not having the time to answer, it was a deeper discomfort with being put on the spot and the lack of reflection that may have had its roots in East Asian culture. The final stage of Lysgaard's model was 'full adaptation' but this was contested by Ward (1998) who disputed that this existed

because a student is unlikely to ever fully achieve this. In my view, none of the ten participants that I interviewed had achieved full adaptation as they had commented openly about the challenges they had faced and continued to face as shown through Chapters 4 and 5.

Another key finding from my study was that East Asian postgraduates commented that there were certain expectations in East Asian educational settings. It was expected of them that in groups they would maintain the group harmony and should be co-operative rather than questioning the educator:

“If you are a student and if it was in Japan then you would normally just participate by listening, you don’t normally say what you think so questions, asking questions that sort of thing doesn’t really happen so it’s all like listen to the tutor carefully and then maybe you could ask at the end some questions but more when you are asked rather than freely asked questions. So that is quite a major difference. I sometimes struggle to participate, tutorial or whatever” (Anna, Japanese, female, 51 years)

Therefore, my study resonates with the findings of another study mentioned in the literature review conducted by Busher et al. (2016). They did not find that East Asian postgraduate students had severely negative study experiences. In their study which included interviews with 15 East Asian students studying in a British university, similar to my research findings, they found that some processes such as the importance of independent learning and need to work in groups led to students perceiving there to be increased cultural distance. Students also found that tutors who helped students understand how to respond in these new situations were appreciated. I too found a strong appreciation for tutors who had helped them navigate the Western cultural clashes encountered which included what was termed as a ‘horizontal-vertical dichotomy’ between East Asia and the West:

“Yeah I think the other thing I would say that the East and West are different, the West learning or thinking is somehow always in isolation, meaning when they look at a project, they only look at a project in isolation whereas the Chinese will see it in a context, it’s almost like horizontally and vertically so where does this fit...?” (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

I had found that understanding what the key underlying cultural beliefs and values were and how they might be different could be a source of distress for students. As with

Busher et al.'s (2016) study, once students were clearer on the social mores, the feelings of isolation and loneliness could be reduced.

Zhao and McDougall's (2008) findings from their six face-to-face interviews with East Asian postgraduates can also be compared to the findings related to perceived cultural distance from my own study. Their findings revealed that East Asian postgraduates held positive attitudes towards online learning and saw it as beneficial particularly for students like them who would want to aim for high grades. The students also reported that online learning helped to reduce language barriers. Another finding was that they were happy to leave messages on the forums on a weekly basis. They also found that East Asian postgraduates had high levels of achievement motivation and saw educators as authoritative. These findings directly correspond with my own findings. Participants in my own study such as Imogen had spoken of reduced language barriers. She did not say that such barriers did not exist but that they were less obvious and were more applicable to the written aspects:

"Yeah talking of the barrier I mentioned earlier - English. Sometimes conversation is not a big problem I think but writing the academic report or essay, sometimes I think it's really difficult" (Imogen, Japanese, female, 46 years)

5.3.2 Benefits of intercultural learning

In my study, some aspects of intercultural learning made participation easier. One key finding was that curricula which were designed to be inclusive and which had examples of materials written by Chinese authors were very helpful for East Asian postgraduates. This is evidenced here by a comment by Holly:

"Some articles are written by Chinese people and there are some studies in the Chinese neighbourhood education settings so I don't feel the cultural barrier with the materials" (Holly, Chinese, female, 27 years)

Therefore, some elements of online learning were advantageous. These findings can be compared to the findings from Thompson and Ku's (2005) research study. This notable similar finding was that I had found that local references in teaching were not always helpful. Instead, using more generalisable, global references in teaching would be more inclusive to students holding different cultural identities. Thompson and Ku (2005)

suggested that if local, cultural references were used, then there should be some background explanation given too wherever possible.

“The Chinese approach to learning is word by word and it took me forever...my cultural identity, cultural perspective, perception dictated the way I learnt in the early years. Only through learning with [The Digital University] that shaped and changed my learning view” (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

As I had found in my own study, it has been implied that East Asian students are willing to self-manage their own learning, however, they may present more anxiety than in their Western counterparts. This finding has also been recognised by other authors such as Smith et al. (2005). They found that in online learning environments, Australian and Chinese Heritage students were very similar in their behaviour. However, as in my study, they found that students with East Asian heritage were more anxious about meeting assessment requirements and about contributing academic posts to the fora. In these instances, the instructor was found to be important at giving guidance, questioning as well as moderating. They also found that it might be harder to address the fact that students might be less forthcoming at contributing online as the participants needed time to process and to reflect. Knowing that East Asians may be even more anxious within certain tasks than other groups of students is important.

5.3.3 Evolution of cultural identities

The findings from my own research study can be compared and contrasted with Tajfel and Turner's (2004) Social Identity Theory. My findings show that Tajfel and Turner's (2004) concepts of in-groups and out-groups still ring true today and that our study's strengths are comparable. These were that Social Identity Theory showed that identity can be fluid and can change depending on the person's environment and their social interactions. This was also confirmed in my study. Students' identities were fluid and changed according to who they were with. For students still living and working in East Asian countries, they had to switch between these cultural identities throughout the week in some cases to fit the workplace, their study environment and the demands of their assignments. Identities can be changed and imposed upon a student which shows that group membership is imagined and perceived rather than tangible or factual:

“Now I’m very comfortable with who I am. In fact, when I go to places, I actually introduce myself as ‘Made in China’, many of the good things in the world now are ‘Made in China’. I think it does make people laugh. I’ve kind of reached that place whereas before I was trying to hide like you said to be part of what I’m actually not and now I’ve reached a place where I am comfortable, this is who I am, I am both”
(Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

Another strength of Social Identity Theory that is also shared by this study’s findings relating to ‘cultural bumps’ is the idea that knowing more about identity can help with reducing intergroup conflict but also a person’s own inner personal conflict. This was also confirmed in my study. By acknowledging perceived differences arising from potential cultural conflict and successfully dealing with it, the students felt stronger and more adaptable.

In addition, my research study relates to Berry’s (1980) model of acculturation (first introduced in Section 2.4). For Berry, there were four possible outcomes arising from the process known as acculturation. These were full integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. As the participants in my own study created hybrid cultural identities, this might at first indicate that they had reached full integration. This is where the student felt able to hold onto their cultural heritage whilst also openly embracing elements of the new culture. This finding must be interpreted with caution though as there is a longitudinal element to the process of acculturation. Just as cultural identity can evolve so can the outcome as it is unclear when the ultimate result or endpoint is. As with Ward’s (1998) critique of Lysgaard’s (1955) concept of ‘full adaptation’, I do not think that my findings necessarily are evidence of full integration as set out by Berry (1980) but they do show that students do not always feel as though they have to completely embrace the Western way of learning and lose their own cultural heritage or detach themselves from it:

“For me, I’m a typical Japanese but after the experience [of] 2 years in UK, it’s changed a bit for my identity...There are lots of amazing things about the differences. Yeah, my identity has been changed a bit, not half like you, but some part of my identity can be said to be more UK or European” (Imogen, Japanese, female, 46 years)

Therefore, I did not speak to students who had gone through what Berry (1980) would have referred to as assimilation. Some students had spoken of having their cultural identity from their East Asian heritage and having short periods where they felt that they

had to muddle through or felt disorientated until they had made changes. Therefore, there is some evidence which concurs with Berry's negative outcomes but again, these may not be the endpoint but a brief time of transition where there is confusion over where the individual belongs. In sum, this has positive implications for universities considering offering online learning as it would appear that at least for East Asian postgraduate students, this mode of learning reduces the amount of time that marginalization or separation are experienced. Additionally, this mode of learning reduces the feelings of anxiety and low mood that may accompany these stages.

5.4 The sources of motivation and effective support for East Asian postgraduate online learners

This section relates to answering the fourth research sub-questions: 'In what ways can students be more effectively supported whilst engaged with online learning?'. What constitutes effective support was discussed in all of the interviews and the key findings from my own research study have been compared and contrasted with the findings within the existing literature. Apart from the participants themselves and their parents, which were discussed in earlier sections, one main source of motivation during their studies was highlighted. This was staff who support students holding different cultural identities.

5.4.1 Staff support

Participants from my research study were sensitive to staff who had gone above and beyond the call of duty. They felt supported by staff and perceived their academic tutors to be aiming to bring the best out of them. Participants were happy when tutors tried to get to know them as individuals rather than to make assumptions about their learning needs. The participants commented that staff might not even be aware of what aspects of their educational practice were inclusive but were grateful for these as they helped removed barriers to participation. In Chapter 4, I provided fuller evidence of the findings and here I have highlighted three key findings relating to staff that might help add to what is known about effectively supporting students holding different cultural identities.

First, the East Asian postgraduates in my study reported requiring more support from staff with moving between an academic, critical style of writing which is expected for assignments, to a more revealing, reflective style of writing which is increasingly expected particularly at postgraduate level. This is closely linked to the findings from Section 5.3 about barriers to participation. The participants commented that they often experienced confusion between using the first- and third- person narrative and therefore support from tutors around this might be helpful. As Daniel had commented:

“Sometimes they ask you don’t use ‘I’ as you are writing, sometimes you are asked to use ‘I’ so that kind of language and culture-related issue can be really confusing to students” (Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years)

It is acknowledged that students holding different cultural identities may struggle with moving between these and may find it hard to be critical as their East Asian cultural identity may discourage this. To an extent, there was some support for the way in which staff might alter a student’s point of view from the literature. More specifically, this finding is similar to Mezirow’s (2000) Theory of Transformative Learning. He asserted that when students encounter new information and then incorporate this into their own thinking and behaviour, this can lead them to reflect and become more critical. As applied to the education context, this might help students holding East Asian cultural identities who face difficulty with this important skill. When my participants commented about coming up against having to write in this new style, they may have been engaging with a process which Mezirow termed ‘subjective reframing’. This was defined as when a person’s social support system or act of reflection helps them to shift their perspective and to become more critical and questioning. Staff may help adjust a student’s frame of reference (the values which underpin their thinking and behaviour). As Section 5.2 highlighted, these frames of reference might have been transmitted by parents and wider society initially. A component of the frame of reference was known in the literature as the participants’ ‘habit of mind’ which can be understood to be the underlying thoughts and values or cultural identity. Therefore, this is confirmed by my findings which showed that staff may be particularly important in helping students come to terms with new beliefs. Students may have initial difficulty with this but would benefit from motivation and assistance adapting to a more critical, reflective style.

Second, the participants in my study commented that specific, personalised feedback may be more helpful than abstract, generic feedback. Whilst this might be more time-consuming for staff, it may be necessary in order to be fully inclusive. My research study has shown that some East Asian students may not feel able to request further feedback or feel confident to clarify aspects of this. The implications of this were made clear in Daniel's comment:

"In terms of tutor feedback, Asian students might not want to ask clarification questions if they don't understand the comments, this is particularly relating to the don't want to offend so that means they never fully understood what is meant"
(Daniel, British-Chinese, male, 44 years).

This highlights a potential major issue for East Asian students. This is that if they receive feedback which is not specific enough to enable them to improve in the first instance, they may end up receiving a lower quality and quantity of feedback than others who might be more able to go back to the tutor via e-mail or to ask in a future online tutorial. For the student, this might be the result of feeling inferior to the tutor and seeing them as more powerful than them. This important finding relating to how East Asian students can view staff who teach them is in contrast with what Mezirow implies is more favourable and what he insists *should* happen. In his original theory, he points to educators not seeing themselves as authority figures, much in direct conflict with my findings, but instead should see themselves as facilitators or provocateurs. Whilst the participants in my study viewed staff as authoritative, instead, Mezirow suggests that educators should learn with the students and help them to become autonomous. This mismatch regarding the perception of the role of the educator might impact upon tutor-student interactions in online environments. Here, it is suggested that I may have helped to expand Mezirow's (2000) Theory of Transformative Learning and that a dimension could be added with relation to students holding different cultural identities.

Other evidence which contrasts with the findings of my research study can be provided by Tam (2000). As mentioned, I found that students did not feel equal to their tutor but instead were worried about offending or upsetting them and did not want to show weakness by not understanding. Tam (2000) suggested that in constructivist learning environments, tutors and students are equals and that, similar to Mezirow's view, the educator should facilitate rather than instruct.

Third, the participants in my study suggested that group teaching was difficult to participate in sometimes but that a useful alternative could be 1:1 or individual contact. This would have been welcomed by the East Asian postgraduates. One Chinese student named Holly was particularly keen:

“I don’t know if it’s possible but I think there could be at least two individual talks with the tutor per module because so far it has been tutorial but tutorials are with a lot of students...1-1 Skype talk would be good” (Holly, Chinese, female, 27 years)

I would argue that this finding might extend what is known about how culture might shape learning and how it might impact upon students’ preferences for being taught. Unless they are relayed onto tutors, they may not realise that groups as a mode of teaching are less welcome to certain groups of students holding cultural identities which may make them feel less able to attend. This finding extends what was put forward in the literature by Cranton and Roy (2003) who built upon Mezirow’s (2000) views on Transformative Learning. The process of Transformative Learning is thought to take place when an event occurs which challenges the nature of the person’s initial view resulting in a ‘disorienting dilemma’. Their worldview can be widened by socially connecting, by speaking to others such as educators. I would argue that my finding that East Asian students might find it easier to navigate disorienting dilemmas by having more individualised contact, extends this. This could be an East Asian twist on a traditional idea about learning, that perhaps true individuation can only be reached when other factors such as not worrying about negative evaluation from others are contributing.

5.5 Contribution to educational theory

5.5.1 The factors that shape East Asian postgraduates’ decisions to engage with online learning

Whilst my study is small and I do not claim to have created a brand new, grand, coherent theory, I strongly suggest that my research findings add to and extend some of the existing theories. Starting with the factors that shape East Asian postgraduates’ decisions to engage with online learning, my study adds to theory in a number of ways. First, authors such as Balestrini and Stoecker (2018) confirmed what had been known anecdotally about the Special Cultural Emphasis on Learning and Education through

analysing media texts. My study extends this by providing the students' perspectives and lived experiences told at the micro-level, to add to what is known at the macro level.

Second, my study has raised important questions about how much choice East Asian postgraduates have when it comes to selecting their careers. This has important implications for staff that support students, not only tutors who deliver curriculum content (as detailed in Section 6.2). It was highlighted from my data that my study contrasts with what is known; there were stories of when not having ownership of career decisions could be damaging. There were also stories of how parents were considered to be highly influential and nurtured a strong work ethic which was closely connected to a person's identity. My study may add to theory about the stigma which exists around being a member of a minoritized group which might make people feel pressured to take the more prestigious disciplines at UK universities online.

Third, there was scant literature which explicitly looked at kiasuism as an explanation for underlying behaviour in online classrooms. My study has added to the literature and as I have built on others' findings, it would be possible for others to build on mine. As student well-being is at the forefront of many higher education institutions agendas, it would be wise for more studies to continue looking at the factors such as kiasu which may influence behaviour in these settings. My study extends the theory and studies such as Bedford and Chua's (2018) because kiasuism has been shown to impact upon students' self-worth and that they may need social validation. At times, this may lead to more negative outcomes such as perfectionism and insecurity. Whilst it may be difficult to have these conversations, there is an urgent need to confront the challenges that might exist when a culture creates a web of people interconnected by values.

5.5.2 The ways in which an East Asian cultural identity presents benefits and barriers to participation for online learners

One of the most significant findings within my own study was the emergence of what I have labelled as 'cultural bumps'. In other words, my participants reported the lived experiences of encountering and overcoming social and psychological challenges that are less visible because they are online. However, they are by no means less important than the challenges that have been introduced in the previous literature as 'culture shock'

which result from physical and geographical transitions (Ahmad et al., 2017; Busher et al., 2016). One major example of a 'cultural bump' as mentioned previously in this thesis is the surprise of having to adapt when encouraged to be a more independent, questioning, critical learner than might have been expected in an East Asian classroom. I suggest that this is a significant finding in the literature and has particular implications for postgraduate students where critical analysis is a key skill that needs to be mastered in order for the degrees to be earned. Another major example of a 'cultural bump' is that East Asian postgraduates may present more anxiety than their Western counterparts even in online environments where this may be reduced. In particular, East Asian postgraduates may be more anxious about meeting assessment requirements and contributing posts.

My study extends and adds to the theory which exists about acculturation in two further important ways. First, my study would suggest that Lysgaard's (1955) first and last stages of his model of sociocultural adjustment may be less relevant for online learners. These were the honeymoon period and full adaptation. My study adds to what is known about online learners as a lot less disruption and geographical culture shock is encountered and full adaptation may never be fully achieved. However, my study does confirm the crisis and adjustment stages and the role of the online tutor as discussed in my own study may well be an important mitigating factor, which was not foreseen in 1955 by Lysgaard. Second, my study also adds to and extends what was put forward by Berry (1980). As I mentioned in Section 5.3, I did not find evidence of 'full integration' but my study has provided evidence that online learning may lessen the feelings of anxiety and low mood that may be experienced in two of Berry's (1980) other outcomes, namely marginalisation and separation. The length of the outcomes in the process of acculturation is still up for considerable debate.

5.5.3 The sources of motivation and effective support for East Asian postgraduate online learners

Having set out how the findings from my themes of family values and 'cultural bumps' may have extended the theory in this area, the final part of Chapter 5 addresses the way in which my findings about sources of motivation may add to and contribute to Mezirow's (2000) Theory of Transformative Learning. My own findings suggest that the process of

Transformative Learning may be more individualised depending on the students' cultural identities. This was most evident due to two key findings from my study. First, my study did show evidence of Mezirow's (2000) subjective reframing but given that the participants reported difficulties with being critical, it may be that for East Asian students, this process is longer and more difficult. I contend that frames of reference, and habits of mind within this, may be more rigid in some cultures. The second important finding relating to staff support and which adds to the educational theory is that there may be a mismatch between how educators see themselves and how they are perceived by students with different cultural identities. In Mezirow's (2000) original theory, he suggests that educators should see their role as to facilitate learning which is taking place or to provoke learning, not that they are superior or more powerful. In direct conflict with this, according to the findings of my study, was the idea that East Asian postgraduates are 'hardwired' to not question and instead view the educator as holding the knowledge. To complicate matters further, Western educators, especially at postgraduate level, aim for students to become more autonomous and independent. This indicates that Mezirow's (2000) work is important but that a new dimension applicable to international students may be missing. There is more to be added to the educational theory with regards to whether online learning might de-professionalise the role of the tutor. It may be that online learning lowers the high status that East Asian students place on tutors as there is a perception that in online learning, students have greater control over their studies and making use of the resources open to them. This dimension of how cultural values might impact upon how online learning takes place is a contribution to theory that this study has added.

To close this section, I wanted to write a final word about a topic which straddles both the educational theory as well as professional practice. I hope my project will add to the theory about encouraging a deeper understanding of culture and its place in history. At present, there have been so many powerful discussions started about decolonising the curriculum or even liberating the curriculum. It can sometimes be uncomfortable to think about cultures can be 'edited out' from a curriculum but as shown in Chapter 4, students responded well to hearing not only about successful Western theorists but about East Asian philosophers or thinkers too. Such examples can help to provide more context for students and it may be that from interviewing students about their experiences, the

complexities of intercultural learning can be better understood from a theoretical perspective. It is always helpful to look at history and to look at theories by bringing in alternative perspectives, not only those who reflect the status sets of those who write about it. I have written about the contribution to professional practice in Section 6.2 where I set out what could be done practically to help with decolonising the curriculum and making it more accessible to students of all different cultures and heritages.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I demonstrate how my research findings have the potential to contribute to professional practice. Here, I unpack how my research findings are already having an influence on professional matters as I chose to disseminate them in workshops with educators, at conferences as well as in accessible publications read by staff and prospective students. I go beyond staff development as the answer and refer to how the findings could be used to positively inform curriculum design. They could also improve the way in which students are supported by staff day-to-day, not only at induction. Next, I reveal how the research could be improved; lay out the limitations of the current study; recommend how these limitations might be overcome in future research studies.

Last but not least, I conclude this chapter with a final reflection on what key lessons have been learnt and could be applied more generally, in light of the wider social and political circumstances. Online learning is having its moment as more people have been at home, have had time to reassess unfulfilled career aspirations or been forced to consider a new job as industries are hard hit. Research studies such as my own can help extend what is known about the challenges and ‘cultural bumps’ that postgraduate students might encounter.

6.2 Contribution to professional practice

My research study’s findings contribute to professional practice and will be of particular relevance and interest to practitioners. I took up many opportunities to disseminate the findings to staff, students and the public and was a recipient at my institution’s Research Excellence Awards for a poster presentation, however, I will not list them all here. Of particular note, however, was a workshop that I led with practitioners at a national FE and HE conference in May 2019 (see Appendix 9 and 10). In attendance were lecturers and support staff, working closely with international students, who expressed a keen wish to arm themselves with more knowledge about how to challenge what I had termed negative ‘cultural bumps’. Staff fed back that they had gained some new knowledge about a difficult area and that they enjoyed having a space to discuss difficult and

sensitive teaching and learning considerations. The take home message was clear to the staff. It is not necessarily negative for students to have culturally instilled values; they can be constructive if well-managed. There are many different cultures which are exactly that, not better or worse, simply a different way of looking at and negotiating the world.

I gained positive feedback from the staff who commented that they recognised the challenges from their everyday teaching practice but had not known what would be helpful from the students' perspective. This was a gap in knowledge which the findings and the workshop helped to fill.

The workshop was able to positively shape their future professional practice by sharing with them the following specific recommendations for supporting students holding different cultural identities:

- *Help with academic writing and critical writing* - More opportunities for providing support focussed upon academic conventions typical of Western postgraduate degree programmes such as critical writing and academic writing circles could be offered and well-advertised. The participants from my study indicated that these were areas they wrestled with and that 1:1 additional support might be helpful for students holding different cultural identities. This could be with university lecturers or other academic writing tutors.
- *Help with choosing a career path in light of complex cultural factors* - More specifically, careers advisors could help students to talk through their future career plans and not just look broadly at this but try to draw out the deeper motivations, for example, parental, cultural, intrinsic, as it was shown by my data that these can have a lasting impact.
- *Help with heightened anxiety which might arise due to the fluidity of cultural identity* - Linked to the above recommendation, the university counselling services and pastoral support available to postgraduate students could be more important than previously thought. From my data, many students had heightened stress and anxiety from the challenge of studying at this level whilst encountering 'cultural bumps' which could affect their levels of satisfaction. Being able to talk through any issues with a professional if their cultural values, for instance kiasu, might put them at increased risk of more anxiety, might be wise. In addition, staff in a

pastoral role, for example, doctoral students' supervisory teams or mentors could be offered training to help them support students more at risk of anxiety due to cultural factors. Furthermore, peer mentoring schemes could be useful if students were matched to students with similar characteristics to them, such as those with similar cultural identities.

- *Diversifying curriculum and assessment design* – As mentioned earlier, my participants felt that global references rather than local references when engaging as an online learner were more useful for students to feel included and to facilitate understanding. Therefore, it might be useful for staff involved in curriculum design to carefully consider examples which are used in the textbook activities and in online activities. In addition, staff delivering the content could consult with the students themselves about what might make a more inclusive curriculum, in a similar way to Public and Patient Engagement groups within the NHS for instance. Checking for absences, repetitions as well as cultural appropriation would be good practice. The line on curriculum design is a difficult one to tread as there could be a pressure amongst educators to feel as though they can only include celebrations or successful minoritized cases or examples. However, from the literature, many students do not wish to be seen as a 'model minority' and might welcome a '3D' rather than '2D' look at histories and curriculums, not only those that paint their personal cultural history in a good light. In addition, it would be good to have a diverse production team. Narrowing attainment gaps might be a welcome side effect from raising issues relating to a narrow curriculum to make it more inclusive, accessible and relatable for students.
- *Help from international student support to integrate online* - A further relevant recommendation for professional practice is that international student support services could help facilitate opportunities for students to drop-in and virtually 'meet' other students. This could help the students to feel less socially isolated, much in keeping with orientation programmes offered in brick universities. However, this should not just be offered once at the start of the year but should be offered at regular intervals. 'Cultural bumps' can occur not just at the start but later on during a degree programme due to the nature of having different modules with different tutors on Master's programmes. On 27th October 2020, I took part in PhD Live Virtual Study Fair – an event organised by

FindAPhD. I was on the chatroom with other representatives of our Graduate School talking to prospective students, many of whom had said they were international telling them about my EdD research as well as my own lived experience as a doctoral research student studying and researching online. The prospective students responded well to the webchat facility (no audio) and so I believe drop-ins similar in format to this would help both current students and those hoping to apply.

Over and above the workshop and the recommendations, I have disseminated the research study's findings online which might have a positive impact upon professional matters for staff who want to increase their knowledge in this area. This may of course be helpful to any prospective postgraduates which is an additional benefit. One article I wrote was published on The Naked Scientists' website:

<https://www.thenakedscientists.com/articles/science-features/how-do-cultures-connect-and-collide>.

It may prompt others to think about issues around inclusion and diversity and the impact they can have on people who do not transition well in education and wider settings. I also wrote two educational articles for OpenLearn which can be found here:

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/psychology/what-happens-when-east-meets-west>

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/psychology/brief-history-the-ever-changing-definition-culture>.

OpenLearn is an educational website providing free learning to both formal and informal learners which can allow people to try online learning before formally registering. From communicating with the OpenLearn team, the page for the first article has had 2,894 visits and attracted 136 unique visitors to it, showing evidence of impacting upon professional matters. The page for the second article has had 149 visits and attracted 114 unique visitors to it, showing evidence of impacting upon professional matters.

My ambitions are to continue teaching and to write curriculum content and pique interest through accessible educational articles. As a direct result of carrying out and submitting my EdD thesis, I have participated more in the events put on by the BME Steering Group.

Most recently, I opted to become a contributor to the new OpenLearn Race and Ethnicity Hub to be launched in November 2020. I will be a peer reviewer and provide academic expertise for any content added on a quarterly basis and am excited to begin.

I believe a rich and deep contribution could also be made by submitting academic articles to be published in professionally, relevant and peer-reviewed journals. One example could be the Journal of Interactive Media in Education; here, I could share my findings with other educators, researchers and academics. To me, it is imperative that anyone who wants to support students with diverse cultural identities has access to the knowledge to do this. My findings have helped me reflect on my own professional practice and might help others to know that kiasu exists as an added pressure for East Asian students; that cultural bumps may differ in visibility from cultural shock but are still just as important, especially given that more students are learning online; and that support from staff does not have to come from only those who deliver curriculum content, but those who might advise on careers, to those who might help develop academic writing skills to those behind the scenes who design the curriculum.

6.3 ‘Old ways won’t open new doors’: Reflections on the research process

The topic of acculturation had been explored before but this study may be one of the first conducted in a British university with East Asian Master’s students which specifically looked at how cultural identities might impact upon and be impacted upon by a Western online programme of study. My research questions were similar to others. However, the research study has extended what is known and provided a new angle on an age-old issue. There are a number of ways in which the research design helped to overcome past problems encountered by previous research.

While some studies looked at culture at a macro-level (for example, Balestrini and Stoeger, 2018), I designed my study to capture in-depth accounts of how cultural identities can be fractured, disassembled and put back together again. I put students’ perspectives firmly back into focus by employing a simple, semi-structured interview design and combining this with a sensitive set of questioning. Rather than simply confirming that a pattern exists, that cultures can shape learning, I looked beyond cultural stereotypes to explore why certain online classroom behaviours might exist and

attempted to illuminate the benefits and barriers to students holding different cultural identities.

Furthermore, the interviews lasted considerably longer, 40 - 90 minutes, than some mentioned in the literature which only lasted for 20 minutes. Whilst I would always advocate quality over quantity, more data was collected and therefore was analysed in my research study. Some other previous studies may have been constrained by speaking to undergraduates who were of a similar age and on the same degree programme. In my research study, I overcame this by conducting interviews with students of a range of ages (the mean age of participants was 39 years). They brought with them a range of life experience and some had experience of Western education (as mentioned in Section 4.2 Participant profiles). I also used opportunistic sampling to reach as diverse a range of disciplines as possible.

My study captured experiences of participants who were studying Business; English; Systems Thinking; Applied Linguistics as opposed to a pool of one single discipline as was often the case in the literature (for example, Cho and Cho, 2019). In other studies, only the female perspective was gathered (see Mun and Hertzog, 2019) whereas in my research study, equal numbers of male and female views were collected.

6.4 Limitations and recommendations for future research

As with any research study, this was not a perfect study and there are a number of ways that the research could be better conducted if it was to be repeated. By acknowledging the limitations of the research study, it is possible to identify ways in which it could be built upon and improved in the future. Six limitations most pertinent to my particular study have been detailed in this section.

One limitation of the study was that it was small-scale. The implication of this is that the views which emerged from the data may not be entirely representative of other East Asian postgraduates. Whilst I did all that I could to ensure that theoretical saturation had been reached, future research could involve conducting a larger number of interviews to help better assess the generalisability of the findings.

Another limitation of the study was that only one interview per participant was carried out. The problem with this is that the comments gathered may have been specific to that particular timepoint and might have changed. One way to overcome this in future research would be to conduct multiple interviews with the same participant over key timepoints during their studies. Rather than only speaking to the students once and in effect having a 'snapshot' of their experiences, repeated interviews in a longitudinal study may be of interest. This is especially given the fluid, flexible nature of identity and the topic of intercultural adjustment, which is a long process.

Another limitation of this study was that only a few cultural identities were discussed and explored. The implication of this is that the views I collected may have been narrow. Only through widening the pool of participants in future studies to include participants holding different cultural identities can any further useful comparisons and contrasts between cultures be made. This could include African, Indian, Hispanic, German cultural identities – there are many different possibilities. On a similar note, another limitation is that half of the participants in the current study were on the same Master's degree programme. This was an unintended consequence arising from opportunistic sampling as participants had been recruited across faculties. This might have narrowed the scope of the study and attracted similar participants or those who had had similar experiences arising from having the same assessments and module content to navigate. To mitigate this, in future studies, more data from a range of Schools and disciplines could be collected.

Another limitation of this study was that during the process of data analysis, by disaggregating the data in the way that is needed to make sense of it, whilst it makes it easier to compare with other findings, it is saddening that some of the data can be 'silenced' or seemingly lost. I have done my best to caveat this by providing the participant profiles and by aiming to tell the participants' stories as a whole. However, it is acknowledged that through coding and through analysing, it is inevitable that some data will not have been included.

The final two main limitations are linked. In this study, only the student perspective was collected and their perceptions about teaching and support staff as well as their parents were made clear. However, what is missing is corroboration with staff and parent perspectives. To overcome this, future studies could extend to recruit staff such as

lecturers, careers advisors and educational advisors. Alternatively, parents could be interviewed to explore whether their perceptions match up with students' perceptions or if there are discrepancies.

Related to the above recommendations for future research are some suggestions of research questions which could extend the findings of the current study:

'In what ways do East Asian postgraduate students' cultural identities change over the course of a Master's degree programme?'

'In what ways do students holding East Asian; African; Hispanic cultural identities experience acculturation when engaging with online learning?'

'How do parents help students create hybrid cultural identities?'

'In what ways do East Asian postgraduate students' parents shape the ideas that students have about what constitutes a 'good career'?'

'In what ways can education professionals effectively diversify the curriculum they write or teach?'

'In what ways do education professionals 'reasonably adjust' their teaching for students who may experience difficulties transitioning between cultures?'

6.5 Final reflection

My doctoral research journey has spanned almost half a decade and in that time much has changed. In Section 3.10, I mentioned that I could be considered a 'hai-gui', Mandarin for a sea-turtle (Gill, 2010), someone who was once familiar with cultures around them but who had to be open to updating their knowledge once they encountered elements which were unfamiliar to them. In the closing stages of writing up in 2020, a once in a century event occurred. COVID-19 emerged bringing out both the best and worst in all of humanity. A global pandemic has swept across almost every nation in the world altering life as we know it for the foreseeable future and creating 'hai-guis' in all of us. I had been wrestling with how to best present the journeys of people straddling two worlds and successfully blending the old with the new despite the sense of grief that can come from leaving parts of who they were behind. I constantly asked myself how I could do their stories justice so

that others such as staff, as well as their families, might empathize and play their part to support them and in turn better themselves. However, I believe that if only three good things can come out of an event so unimaginable, it is the following.

Every human now has a very acute awareness of what it is like having to navigate the unfamiliar. We have all had no choice but to learn very fast how to overcome bumps. We have all had to be innovative and find ways to turn all of the anxiety and anguish that we have endured into the strength to fight an invisible threat, be it an infectious disease or the fear of a fractured identity. The only way for everyone to feel more comfortable and safer, is to educate ourselves and to co-operate.

Every human now has been starkly reminded that the geographical boundaries in the world to separate countries and cultures have been socially constructed. Families are dispersed all around the world and people move from place to place, therefore we cannot move forward only working in our own national interests. Instead, we need to accept that we are part of an international community and act like one, appreciating each other's values and working to common goals.

Every human now is conscious of the fact that just because something may be experienced as mild for us, if there is no mitigation, it can be experienced in a much more severe way for someone we know who might be more vulnerable than us. This might bring about much more altruistic behaviour, perhaps deepening an awareness that, to evade crises escalating further, we can all find ways to help others to live with fewer limits.

The final words of this thesis are not my own, but those of the students who selflessly gave up their time to share their stories with me in the hope that they could help others similar, as well as different, to them:

"I think the research you're doing is quite interesting to see where there is a gap, it's very interesting" (Jessica, Chinese-Austrian, female, 36 years)

"I feel more clear now I have talked to you. It's just a good opportunity, thank you so much for the opportunity" (Imogen, Japanese, female, 46 years)

"I'm really grateful actually that you chose this subject. You are becoming a spokesperson for the group" (Daniel, British-Chinese male, 44 years)

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ethical approval from the main ethics panel

Appendix 2: Ethical approval from the student research ethics panel

Appendix 3: Interview schedule

Appendix 4: E-mail invitation

Appendix 5: Information sheet

Appendix 6: Consent form

Appendix 7: Debrief sheet

Appendix 8: Interview exemplar transcript coded in NVivo with colour striping (student)

Appendix 9: Handout to support the conference workshop with education professionals

Appendix 10: Anonymous responses from the conference workshop

Appendix 1: Ethical approval from the main ethics panel

(Anonymised – The personal details of the Chair have been removed as well as mentions of The Digital University's real name and institution logo).

From	
Email	
Extension	
To	Laura Tan, CREET
Subject	'When East Meets West: Exploring how cultural differences may impact upon the unique experiences and participation of East Asian University postgraduates in Western online education'
HREC Ref	HREC 2016 2410 Tan
AMS ref	
Submitted	18/10/16
Decision date	18/11/16

Memorandum

This memorandum is to confirm that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted for ethics review, has been given favourable opinion by Ethics Committee

Please note the following:

1. You are responsible for notifying the HREC immediately of any information received by you, or of which you become aware which would cast doubt on, or alter, any information contained in the original application, or a later amendment which would raise questions about the safety and/or continued conduct of the research.
2. It is essential that any proposed amendments to the research are sent to the HREC for review, so they can be recorded and a favourable opinion given prior to the any changes being implemented (except only in cases of emergency when the welfare of the participant or researcher is may be effected).
3. You are authorised to present this memorandum to outside bodies such as NHS Research Ethics Committees in support of any application for future research clearance. Also, where there is an external ethics review, a copy of the application and outcome should be sent to the HREC.
4. U research ethics review procedures are fully compliant with the majority of grant awarding bodies and their frameworks for research ethics.
5. At the conclusion of your project, by the date stated in your application, you are required to provide the Committee with a final report to reflect how the project has progressed, and importantly whether any ethics issues arose and how they were dealt with. A copy of the final report template can be found on the research ethics website

Kind regards,

is incorporated by Royal Charter (number RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (number SC 038302)

Appendix 2: Ethical approval from the student research ethics panel

(Anonymised – The personal information of the person sending the e-mail have been removed below)

Hi Laura,

Thank you very much for the update about your research.

Your changes have approval and the will provide you with your sample in early August.

Please send us any new or updated documentation such as your invitation to the students and your interview questions.

Best regards,

Appendix 3: Interview schedule

(Anonymised – The centre, The Digital University's real name and the DU's real initials have all been removed below)

<p style="text-align: center;">Doctorate in Education research project</p> <p style="text-align: center;">'When East Meets West: Exploring how cultural differences may impact upon East Asian postgraduates' experiences of learning at a distance'.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Interview Schedule</p> <p>Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of this research project. I'd like to begin by asking you some quick demographic questions e.g. age/years of HE experience if that's ok?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is your gender identity?2. What is your age?3. What subject are you currently studying?4. How long have you been studying with the U?5. Do you have any prior experience of online and distance education? If so, how many years / modules? <p>Thank you for answering those quick questions. I'm now going to ask you a few broader questions about cultural identity and your experiences of education so far. You can tell me as little as you like and feel free to draw upon the experiences you have had throughout your life too. There are no 'right or wrong answers', I am just interested in understanding your experience of HE so far so that my findings may be able to help improve this for future students.</p> <p>Main Areas of Discussion: (only a guide, others may come up in discussion)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Could you tell me a little bit about the factors which affected your decision to engage with online learning?▪ Could you tell me a little bit about what you have most enjoyed or found to be the main advantages of engaging with online learning?▪ Could you tell me a little bit about what you have found more challenging or found to be the main disadvantages of engaging with online learning?▪ In what ways do you feel that identifying with an East Asian culture but studying in a Western learning environment has affected your experience of online learning? (any benefits / any barriers associated with this?)▪ What do you feel are the core characteristics of an East Asian culture?▪ What do you feel are the core characteristics of a Western culture?▪ Could you tell me about any day-to-day examples of how experiencing culture shock or clash of cultural values has affected your ability to study effectively?▪ What has helped you manage any culture shock or clash of cultural values that you have experienced e.g. anything you do / anything U staff do / any particular U processes?

Appendix 4: E-mail invitation

(Anonymised – The centre, The Digital University's real name and personal details of the researcher and supervisors including e-mail addresses have all been removed below)

<p style="text-align: center;">Doctorate in Education research project</p> <p style="text-align: center;">'When East Meets West: Exploring how cultural differences may impact upon East Asian postgraduates' experiences of learning at a distance'.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Participant E-mail Invitation</p> <p>Dear _</p> <p>Our second-year Doctorate in Education (EdD) doctoral research student, Laura Tan, is currently in the main data collection phase of her research. Her project is entitled 'When East Meets West: Exploring how cultural differences may impact upon East Asian postgraduates' experiences of learning at a distance'. The aim of the research project is to illuminate how cultural identity and higher education experiences are interconnected. She has so far found that the existing literature base tells us about how culture shock and therefore cultural identity may affect international students more generally, however, she is interested in hearing about your experiences to add to this knowledge. Few studies have spoken to postgraduate students who may be engaging in study within a Western university whilst identifying with an East Asian cultural identity.</p> <p>Laura is warmly inviting you to engage in a 1:1 interview with her. This can be conducted face-to-face or via Skype (whichever you would prefer depending on geographical location / nerves etc.) and is likely to last between 45 minutes to 1 hour. Laura is happy to be flexible depending on what you would be happiest doing. She completed her pilot study with four students last year and found that the students enjoyed talking about their experiences.</p> <p>To be eligible for this study, you need to be a current University postgraduate student (e.g. <u>Master's</u> student) and be of East Asian heritage or cultural identity (e.g. Chinese, Singaporean, Korean etc.). If you are interested in being interviewed, have any questions about your eligibility or indeed any other questions, please e-mail . Laura will then be in touch with a proposed date/time for your interview and be able to reply to any questions too. Please find attached an information sheet for further details as well as a consent form which you will need to fill out and return to Laura should you wish to participate.</p> <p>Many thanks for taking the time to read this invitation.</p> <p>If you have any questions about any of the information above, here are our contact details:</p>

Appendix 5: Information sheet

(Anonymised – The centre, The Digital University's real name and real initials of the DU have all been removed below along with contact details)

Doctorate in Education research project

'When East Meets West: Exploring how cultural differences may impact upon East Asian postgraduates' experiences of learning at a distance'.

Please take the time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask any questions. The aim of this information sheet is to give you an overview of the aims of the research project, details about what participation will involve as well as the potential benefits it may have for you to enable you to make an informed choice about your participation. If you have any questions about any of the following information, here are our contact details:

What is the aim of the research and why is it being carried out?:

I am a second-year Doctorate in Education (EdD) research student studying at . I am now in the main data collection phase of my research and the aim of the research project is to illuminate how cultural identity and higher education experiences are interconnected. The existing literature base tells us about how culture shock may affect international students, however, there are still key questions which are to be explored. The higher education sector is becoming increasingly more internationalised and the rise of online and distance education means that we need to find out more about students from students. Furthermore, few studies have spoken to students who may be engaging in study within a Western context while identifying with an East Asian cultural identity. Therefore, I am inviting you to complete a 1:1 narrative interview to allow you to help me gain a better understanding of this area. To be eligible for the study, you need to be a current Master's student and be of East Asian heritage or cultural identity e.g. Chinese, Singaporean, Korean, Japanese etc.

What are the benefits of the research to me and others like me?:

To my knowledge, no other research carried out by has explored this exact area of enquiry yet. However, learning more about how to ensure the accessibility of HE to postgraduate students and to those with different cultural identities could promote a more inclusive higher education context, in line with the 's mission statement. Your participation in the research may help us shape the future of teaching and learning within .

What is involved?:

If you agree to take part in this study, you will have the opportunity to engage in a 1:1 narrative interview with me where I will ask you about your experience and participation in Western online education. I will ask you some questions about what motivated you to study with the , the benefits/challenges of online learning and what support you have found helpful or would find helpful. The interview is semi-structured so there may be other discussions that might arise naturally which is absolutely fine.

Appendix 5: Information sheet

(Anonymised – The centre, The Digital University's real name and real initials of the DU have all been removed below along with contact details)

About taking part:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to take part, you will be asked to sign and return the online consent form to confirm that you have understood what taking part in this research involves. If you consent to taking part, you have the right to withdraw, without giving a reason. If you withdraw, any information you have provided will also be withdrawn at your request. You can withdraw at any point prior to statistical and thematic analysis (end of May 2018). After analysis has begun, as the data will have been anonymised, this will no longer be possible.

A note about talking about sensitive or difficult issues:

It is acknowledged that some of the topics or issues which you may come across may be of a sensitive nature. It may cause some mild distress to relive such events although it is hoped that this would be short-lived. However, as I am a research student not a medical professional, if you experience intense feelings of worry or severe low mood, it is recommended that you consult your GP or contact an organisation such as Mind or The Samaritans in order to seek help and support. All information given will be kept confidential, unless I feel that you have told me something that causes me to worry about your welfare or the welfare of others. In this case, I may need to share these details with my supervisors or the ethics committee within my institution. In an extreme scenario, if I felt that you were at an immediate risk, I would call 999.

What will happen to the results of the study?:

The data collected from the research project will be used for the purpose of the researcher's EdD thesis at . If the results are presented at a conference or published, you will not be able to be distinguished from the data so you will still be able to remain anonymous and they will only be discussed in terms of the group as a whole. You can request a summary of the results if you would like by indicating this on the consent form or by e-mailing me directly using the contact details below.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

If you have any questions or feedback, here are the project team's contact details:

Doctoral Research Student: Miss Laura Tan
Main Supervisor: Professor Peter Lavender
Co-Supervisor: Dr. Gill Clifton

Appendix 6: Consent form

(Anonymised – The centre and The Digital University's real name have been removed)

Doctorate in Education research project		
'When East Meets West: Exploring how cultural differences may impact upon East Asian postgraduates' experiences of learning at a distance'.		
Participant Consent Form		
Participant ID: <table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 20px;"></table>		
Please read the statements below and if you agree, please initial the boxes below:		
<input style="width: 50px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/>	I confirm that I have read the information sheet. I fully understand the content and therefore agree to take part in the research study.	
<input style="width: 50px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/>	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am have the right to withdraw*, without having to give a reason. I understand that I can withdraw myself and my data during this time and prior to statistical and thematic analysis (by the end of May 2018). After analysis has begun, as the data will have been anonymised, this will no longer be possible.	
<input style="width: 50px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/>	I consent to the interview being recorded using a voice recorder and give permission for this to be transcribed verbatim following the interview. The data arising from this interview will be securely stored on a password-protected and fingerprint access-protected laptop in accordance with the Data Protection Act.	
<input style="width: 50px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/>	I understand that anything I say will be treated confidentially and only used for research purposes, in accordance with the Data Protection Act.	
<input style="width: 50px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/>	I would be interested in receiving a written summary of the findings. I am happy to receive these via e-mail.	
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 30px;"></table>		
Name of participant	Date	Signature
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 30px;"></table>		
Name of researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 7: Debrief sheet

(Anonymised – The centre, The Digital University's real name, peer support group and personal details of the researcher and supervision team have all been removed below).

Doctorate in Education research project

'When East Meets West: Exploring how cultural differences may impact upon East Asian postgraduates' experiences of learning at a distance'.

Participant Debrief Sheet

Thank you for taking part in the research project. It is hoped that by gathering data from students that I can better understand your experiences to improve my own professional practice, to help inform University as to what might remove barriers to learning and how we can improve the student experience as well as to perhaps contribute findings in the form of journal articles.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary, and your data is both confidential and anonymous. If you later decide that you do not want to take part in the research project, you have the right to withdraw and may contact the researcher and your data will be removed at your request. In practical terms, you are free to withdraw up until statistical and thematic analysis has begun (end of May 2018). After analysis has begun, as the data will have been anonymised, this will no longer be possible. If you wish to request a copy of a summary of results of the study, you may have already indicated this on the consent form or you can e-mail me (see below).

This research study may have reminded you about personal issues such as your cultural identity. As I am a research student and not a medical professional, I cannot give professional advice about these issues. However, there are several places I can signpost you to should you wish to talk to someone:

Your local General Practitioner (GP) or local NHS walk-in centre.

NHS Direct - <http://www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx/> Phone: 111 (UK)

Samaritans - <http://www.samaritans.org/> Phone: 116 123 (UK) / jo@samaritans.org

Nightline - <http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/help-and-support/nightline/> Phone: 020 7631 0101 (UK) / listening@nightline.org.uk

Peer Support -

Mind - <http://www.mind.org.uk/> Phone: 0300 123 3393 (UK) / info@mind.org.uk

Rethink - <https://www.rethink.org/> Phone: 0300 5000 927 (UK)

If you have any questions, here are the research project team's contact details:

Appendix 8: Interview exemplar transcript coded in NVivo with colour stripping

Interview Transcript with NVivo Colour Striping	
<p>Laura:</p> <p>Hello, is that _?</p> <p>P#6R:</p> <p>Hi, how are you?</p> <p>Laura:</p> <p>Yes, I'm very good thank you, how are you? Can you hear me OK?</p> <p>P#6R:</p> <p><u>Yeah</u> I can, no problem.</p> <p>Laura:</p> <p>Good. And you're OK today, you're well?</p> <p>P#6R:</p> <p>Yes, everything's good thank you. It's my weekend now in Saudi so yeah all is good thanks.</p> <p>Laura:</p> <p>Oh of course it is, I have family in Singapore and it's always weird, I have to think in different time zones when I'm speaking to them.</p> <p>P#6R:</p> <p>Yeah, yeah, you get used to it.</p> <p>Laura:</p> <p>You do, I'll be all perky and bubbly and they just want to go to bed.</p> <p>P#6R:</p> <p>It's not that late here, it's mid-afternoon so it's OK.</p> <p>Laura:</p> <p>It's 2 hours isn't it?</p> <p>P#6R:</p> <p>Yeah <u>so</u> it's 3 o'clock here.</p>	<p>Stress on Q1 courses all over the World</p> <p>Decreasing Cultural Gap</p> <p>Reason for Being Interviewed</p> <p>East Asian Students coming to the West</p> <p>Temporary Culture Shock</p> <p>Studying While Working</p> <p>Tutor Support</p> <p>Not Faced Cultural Differences</p> <p>Support Need Other Support</p> <p>Triumph of Tradition</p> <p>Studying Anywhere in the World</p> <p>Challenging Experiences of Forums</p> <p>Challenging East Asian</p> <p>Studying to Learn Theories</p> <p>West-West Culture Shock</p> <p>Family Support</p> <p>Agree can Unite Students</p> <p>Western Learning Style</p> <p>Importance of Peer Support and Discussion</p> <p>Culture-Specific Examples when Teaching</p> <p>Language Barriers for East Asian Students</p> <p>Lived and Worked in both Asia</p> <p>Coding Density</p>

them on Q&A courses all over the world
 Increasing Cultural Clap
 Research for Being Interviewed
 and Asian Students coming to the West
 Learning Culture Shock
 Studying While Working
 Tutor Support
 Not Found Cultural Differences
 Present Near Other Support
 Origins of Taiwan
 Studying Anywhere in the World
 Studying Experiences of Friends
 Learning While Asian
 Studying to Learn Themselves
 West: West Culture Shock
 Family Support
 Age can Learn Students
 Movement Learning Style
 Importance of Peer Support and Discussion
 Culture Shock: Examples when Teaching
 Language Between Two Asian Students
 and and Friends in South Asia
 Study Identity

Laura:

So 2 hours ahead, that's brilliant. Cool OK, well thank you so much for letting me speak to you. I always get nervous about voice recorders and things not working so that's why I try and set them up before so I don't miss out or have to rearrange them or anything but thank you.

PM6R:

No worries.

Laura:

I appreciate, I'm sure you've got other things on as well, time is very precious so thank you so much.

PM6R:

It's not a problem, I read through the, your overview of your research and it relates quite heavily to what I do in my working world and I know how difficult it is to get research participants, gathering information so yeah not a problem at all.

Laura:

Yeah no that's fab, thanks so much and as you've mentioned it, equally I'm happy to reciprocate with any studies, if you need people to speak to and I'm eligible then I'm happy to, you can call on me, that's fine.

PM6R:

Wonderful, thank you.

Laura:

That's alright. So yeah as you've said, you've looked through the information sheet, did everything make sense, any questions from that?

PM6R:

No, no, it all made sense to me. So as we go along if I'm not clear on anything, I'll ask you but yeah it seemed to make sense to me.

Laura:

OK brilliant. I always check before I get going because once I get going, I don't tend to go back.

PM6R:

OK.

Laura:

Great, OK thanks so, so, so much. The first questions I ask everyone are quick demographic basic ones so I hope that's OK.

PM6R:

Sure, no problem.

them on Q&A courses all over the world
 Increasing Cultural Clap
 Research for Being Interviewed
 and Asian Students coming to the West
 Learning Culture Shock
 Studying While Working
 Tutor Support
 Not Found Cultural Differences
 Present Near Other Support
 Origins of Taiwan
 Studying Anywhere in the World
 Studying Experiences of Friends
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 Studying to Learn Themselves
 West: West Culture Shock
 Family Support
 Age can Learn Students
 Movement Learning Style
 Importance of Peer Support and Discussion
 Culture Shock: Examples when Teaching
 Language Between Two Asian Students
 and and Friends in South Asia
 Study Identity

Laura:

Then it'll be the bigger, broader, more interesting ones!

PM6R:

OK.

Laura:

So first question is how would you describe your cultural identity, your cultural background?

PM6R:

It's a bit complicated really I suppose, I identify mainly as a White Westerner I suppose but as I mentioned to you before, my grandfather was Chinese so there's always been a Chinese impact throughout my entire life, it's been a constant feature, always there in the background so I guess when I get to answering questions on paper, I never really know. Sometimes I put I'm White, sometimes I put I'm mixed background but on top of that I also have dual nationality because I was born in the UK and I grew up in South Africa.

Laura:

Ah I thought I could detect an accent!

PM6R:

Yeah that's it yeah, so it's a bit complicated heritage-wise, nationality-wise but erm, for this study, the Chinese heritage has always been a constant feature somewhere in the background of my life.

Laura:

Yeah and I know all about complicated heritage don't worry. I'm born in the UK, mum's from England, dad's from Singapore but we also have Italian grandparents so whatever you call that, that's what I am.

PM6R:

Wonderful yeah.

Laura:

I love that you've got such a rich mix, that sounds really lovely. Very diverse.

PM6R:

Yeah and I suppose, my wife is from Thailand as well so I've got that influence going on as well. We've been married for 7 years now.

Laura:

Aw so I can see in your picture, you've got a young one as well? A little girl?

PM6R:

Yeah, yeah exactly. She was born in France! (laughs).

[illegible]

Yeah.

Laura:

That's great. Linked to that but it's not on my list. Before you did the _U, were you studying at a university in the UK or South Africa?

PRGR:

Yeah, I studied in South Africa at the University of _ in Johannesburg which is where I'm from so that was what 1995-1998, graduated in 98, did English Literature and Film.

Laura:

OK, that's good.

PRGR:

Yeah. It didn't qualify me to do anything when I left university but it was interesting nonetheless.

Laura:

Yeah it's good, I was just thinking you're going to be one of my most diverse students. I love it so you're mixed heritage, different subjects as well so it's good, we'll have plenty to talk about.

PRGR:

Good stuff!

Laura:

Good. Erm and was it difficult say transitioning from traditional you know South African university to the OU or were you OK, did you adapt to the style?

PRGR:

Erm, I think it's been OK, there was quite a big gap I suppose from my university to OU and even between that period, I've had a lot of experience with relating to people from different cultures so one thing you get from the courses, you get people from all over the world so I found that fairly straightforward but also I've had experience, I think I did struggle on my first online course, the one I was speaking about before, the Postgraduate Diploma for teaching.

Laura:

Yeah.

PRGR:

That I felt quite stressful. I'm not sure if it was because of my age or because of not being used to online learning. It could be a factor of both I think.

Laura:

Increasing Cultural Gap

Reason for Being Interviewed

East Asian Students coming to the West

Temporary Culture Shock

Studying While Working

Tutor Support

Not Focused Class and Difficulties

Distance Taught Other Support

Transition to Online Learning

Studying English in the World

Challenging Experience of Program

Studying to Learn Thoroughly

West African Culture Shock

Family Support

Age can Leave Students

Western Learning Style

Importance of Peer Support and Discussion

Culture Shock: Examples when Teaching

Language Barriers for East Asian Students

Lived and Worked in East Asia

Cultural Diversity

Figure 10: OU courses all over the World

OK so thank you for the factors and things. The next question I love to ask as everyone gets all excited is about what things you've most enjoyed about online learning, parts of the courses, assessments, tutorials, anything like that, anything you've enjoyed?

PRGR:

Erm for me, the biggest thing that I've enjoyed is that I've been able to apply what I've been learning directly to my work. Being a manager, I mean I started the MBA because I felt confident, I felt like I was always reacting to issues that were coming up but um doing an MBA with the _U, I've been able to learn a lot of theories, a lot of concepts and apply these to my job and I've really found the whole job, the whole role of being a manager has become so much easier and far less stressful and far more interesting because of what I'd been studying so I think that's the aspect that I've learnt the most. Erm when there's been you know, I find that when you have these TGFs and you get put in your TGFs, sometimes they can work really well, sometimes they can be quite flat. When they work really well, it's really nice.

Laura:

Mhm hhm.

PRGR:

When you've got a group of people that are quite motivated to talk to each other and comment on each other, that's when it's really nice. I quite enjoy that aspect as well, get different perspectives, get different ideas, feed back on what they like, that kind of thing.

Laura:

Mhm hhm, that sounds really good. I think it's lovely to hear how your job is complemented by the studying and like the other way too.

PRGR:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Laura:

Yeah that's great. And then in terms of, have you engaged in many online tutorials or do you tend to stick to the books and StudentHome and make your own way, what approach?

PRGR:

Erm, I do. I mean because there's a whole range of things, the day schools I can't attend but on the actual TGFs, I do as much as possible but again I'm very much, it depends on how the group is. I just completed a module where there was very little engagement on the TGF and you know at first I started a little bit but it didn't seem like anyone else was being involved so I just kind of left it and didn't bother.

Laura:

Reason for Being Interviewed

East Asian Students coming to the West

Temporary Culture Shock

Studying While Working

Tutor Support

Not Focused Class and Difficulties

Distance Taught Other Support

Transition to Online Learning

Studying English in the World

Challenging Experience of Program

Studying to Learn Thoroughly

West African Culture Shock

Family Support

Age can Leave Students

Western Learning Style

Importance of Peer Support and Discussion

Culture Shock: Examples when Teaching

Language Barriers for East Asian Students

Lived and Worked in East Asia

Cultural Diversity

[illegible]

Tutor Support

Types of Tutorials

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

<p>Peer-Ed: An online tool for the world</p> <p>Democratizing Cultural Gap</p> <p>Reason for Being: We've created Real Asian Students coming to the West</p> <p>teaching Culture Shock</p> <p>Studying While Working</p> <p>Tutor Support</p> <p>Don't Need Other Support</p> <p>Triangulation of Taiwan</p> <p>Studying Anywhere in the World</p> <p>Diversity: Experiences of Foreign</p> <p>Defining East Asian</p> <p>Studying to Learn 7 theories</p> <p>West Coast Culture Shock</p> <p>Family Support</p> <p>Age can Unleash Students</p> <p>Importance of Peer Support and Discussion</p> <p>Culture Shock: Empowers when Teaching</p> <p>Language Barriers for East Asian Students</p> <p>Cultural Diversity</p>	<p>Peer-Ed: An online tool for the world</p> <p>Democratizing Cultural Gap</p> <p>Reason for Being: We've created Real Asian Students coming to the West</p> <p>teaching Culture Shock</p> <p>Studying While Working</p> <p>Tutor Support</p> <p>Don't Need Other Support</p> <p>Triangulation of Taiwan</p> <p>Studying Anywhere in the World</p> <p>Diversity: Experiences of Foreign</p> <p>Defining East Asian</p> <p>Studying to Learn 7 theories</p> <p>West Coast Culture Shock</p> <p>Family Support</p> <p>Age can Unleash Students</p> <p>Importance of Peer Support and Discussion</p> <p>Culture Shock: Empowers when Teaching</p> <p>Language Barriers for East Asian Students</p> <p>Cultural Diversity</p>
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Not Faced Cultural Difficulties

1554 JOURNAL

1554 JOURNAL

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1554 JOURNAL

1554 JOURNAL

1554 JOURNAL

Yeah, yeah.

Coding Density

Defining Fear Action

Yeah they've certainly given me a lot of support you know I have to fix up routines about how I'm going to study and once that routine has been set in place, my family has been very supportive in helping me stick to that routine. I think you know with things like study you just have to get into that process, it's something you, you can't do it, well maybe some people can but I certainly can't just do

Language Barriers for East Asian Students

Great, well that's literally all of my questions, you've been so helpful but did you have any questions for me, was there anything you didn't get to tell me or anything that you weren't sure about or wanted to clarify?

P6R: No, I didn't have anything that I wasn't sure about or anything to clarify, I'm trying to think because I'd been thinking about it the last couple of days because I mean the reason I responded to your request is because it does fit in quite nicely with the work that I do and is something that I'm involved in on a day-to-day basis, I work in the education sector.

Laura: Yeah.

P6R: No, I think everything's covered.

Laura: Yeah nothing else, sometimes I'm racing through so nothing else that you wanted to tell me about at all?

P6R: No I don't think so. If I do come up with something, I'll drop you an e-mail and say I forgot to mention this...

Laura: Yeah, yeah, of course.

P6R: But at the moment I think that's everything.

Laura: Brilliant well thank you so much, I always feel bad that I can't come and buy you a slice of cake or something obviously as everyone's so spread out but I'm eternally grateful for your time, time is the biggest resource isn't it.

P6R: I'm more than happy to help.

Laura: It's nice to hear another person as you are personally connected to it. That's how I feel about it too, I have a personal connection to different cultures, I've lived in Singapore, I've lived here so when you were drawing upon your experience, it's nice to hear how you found things and to hear similarities with my dad too.

P6R: Good!


Laura: Honestly, thank you. You've been so, so helpful.

Buts on EU courses all over the world
Diversity Culture Gap
Reason for Being Interviewed
East Asian Students coming to the West
Temporary Culture Shock
Studying While Working
Tutor Support
Not Fossil Cultural Differences
Don't Need Chinese Support
Temporary Culture Shock
Studying in America in the World
Changing Perspectives of Foreign
During First Year
Studying to Learn Through
West Meets Culture Shock
Family Support
Age Gap Culture Shock
Western Learning Style
Importance of Peer Support and Discussion
Cultural Differences in Learning
Language Barrier for East Asian Students
Lived and Worked in East Asia
Coping Strategy

PPSR:
Thank you very much, it's been a pleasure.

Appendix 9: Handout to support the conference workshop with education professionals

CAN Conference 2019, Thursday 30th May 2019
Parallel Session 2 (11.45am – 12.45pm)
'When East Meets West – Supporting students from different cultural backgrounds



Laura Tan
Associate Lecturer in Psychology
The ___ University
My e-mail address: _____

The University

1

The aims of this session are for you to...

- Learn about my doctoral research project entitled 'When East Meets West'. I'll speak a little bit about my motivations, the method and briefly the themes that were revealed.
- Engage in a small group activity based around some of the interesting quotes that I gathered as part of my research. This may help you reflect on your own professional practice and some of the quotes might feel familiar or resonate as I have found in other talks I have delivered.
- Consider how the research could be extended further. I'll encourage you to think about what you would like to know more about, has it sparked any thinking?
- Share good practice with other lovely, helpful and like-minded people.

And most importantly...

- Enjoy yourselves! ☺

2

Introducing me...

- I'm ___ staff and an ___ student.
- I've taught on a number of Level 1 and Level 2 undergraduate Psychology modules since 2014. Prior to this, I have taught social psychology, biological psychology and methods at the University of Cambridge.
- I'm committed to my own lifelong learning – I am a serial student and studied Education and Law alongside teaching.
- I'm in the final stages of writing up my Doctorate in Education thesis to submit in October 2019 (fingers crossed!).
- I'm British mixed race. I was born in London to a Singaporean father and English mother. This (along with many other things) has helped fuel my motivations to conduct research exploring cultural differences, identity and how these shape learning.

3

Introducing you...

- What's your name and current role?
- Why did you choose to attend this session i.e. what are you hoping to gain? (knowledge/to share your own experience/because you've worked with 'international' students?)
- As we're focussing on different cultures, name one country you have travelled to (not necessarily for work) that you'd recommend to the group!




4

My Full Title...

When East Meets West: A qualitative study exploring the cross-cultural experiences of East Asian students learning with The ___ University

5

When East Meets West – brief overview of my research (I've love to talk for hours but we've only got one so we'll see what I can cover given the time constraints!)

- Gaps in the literature...
- Aim...
- Method...
- Practical issues...
- Key themes revealed...
- Dissemination...

6

Small group activity:

Either in your tables or in groups of about 3-4 people, when I put the quotes up, spend 3 minutes considering:

1. Which quotes resonate with you the most? Have you come across similar issues in your professional practice or own studies perhaps?
2. Which theme do the groups of quotes come under: family values, cultural bumps or sources of motivation?

Make notes and be prepared to feed back to the group if you'd like to offer any ideas.

7

When East Meets West – Illustrative Quotes Activity

"I think for anyone that has a part-time job, not just East Asian[s] but anyone who has a job, studying online actually gives you the opportunity to study something in a systematic way without having [to] physically go to that place" (Harper, Chinese female, 27 years)

"It's been my dream to one day help those who are marginalised and who cannot afford to pay consultants" (Charlie, Kadazan – formerly North Borneo – male, 61 years)

"What I really enjoyed is their course is really connected with reality. It's not just the academic stay[ing] in the Ivory tower" (Daniel, British Chinese male, 44 years)

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When East Meets West – Illustrative Quotes Activity

"There is this kind of legitimate, recognised profession but there's also this kind of Mickey Mouse or Playboy profession. From an Asian perspective" (Daniel, British Chinese male, 44 years)

"If you want the cultural influence from my side, my parents were grafters, heavy, heavy grafters when they came over to the country and a good bit of that has basically rubbed off on me and if you want to see if there's a cultural influence, it stems back as far as that" (Brad, Scottish-born Chinese male, 36 years)

"For quite a few years actually, my mum didn't want to accept it but in front of her friends she wouldn't talk about it. I said to her and others I'm probably the only Chinese student to work with the poor, all the others come here to study how to make more money" (Daniel, British Chinese male, 44 years)

"There's something called kiasu, it's something in Hokkien if I'm not mistaken, they don't like to lose anything. They tend not to lose in any kind of decisions, any kind of competitions. That kind of thing is the same across in Asia" (Emily, Malaysian-Chinese female, 28 years)

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When East Meets West – Illustrative Quotes Activity

"We Japanese students are accustomed with learning style, sitting in class and listen[ing] to the teachers' direction and I think little discussions in the class compared with European class" (George, Japanese male, 26 years)

"So from leaving China and to come to this country new and where am I, so in terms of sort of fitting in with the British culture or should I leave all of mine behind? Gradually, it has been a painful process at times, I came at peace with that and hold them together very well now" (Daniel, British Chinese male, 44 years)

"Our culture spills out onto everything that you say and you do, small little references, phrases that you use, references to pop culture, all those kinds of things, they come out, even if you don't mean them to. Those kinds of things will get lost on foreign students. If I think back, I said my biggest culture shock was coming to the UK, one of the things I found very difficult is people assumed that I would get all these pop culture references, you know like going back to TV shows, I have no idea what you're talking about, I've never seen those TV programmes" (Frankie, Mixed - South African/British/Chinese male, 39 years)

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When East Meets West – Illustrative Quotes Activity

"It's not about marks though. It's just a sense that the tutor cares. You can also see this during online tutorial and looking at the materials they present. It's this feeling like 'wow' she really puts heart into it and as an experienced consultant I know how much thought and effort is put into the presentation" (Charlie, Kadazan – formerly North Borneo – male, 61 years)

"I have to fix up routines about how I'm going to study and once that routine has been set in place, my family has been very supportive in helping me stick to that routine" (Frankie, Mixed - South African/British/Chinese male, 39 years)

"I think you only need about 2-3 other people who are quite into it for it to be good and to get engaged. I think my first module with the OU, the whole group was quite engaged, it was quite good. I did a marketing module and you know the group was probably about 12 of us but there were about 4-5 of us I think that were regularly on the forums and talking and that was good. That was enough, you don't need a large number, you don't need all of you to really make full use of it" (Frankie, Mixed - South African/British/Chinese male, 39 years)

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Wrapping up...

Individually, could you write down the following: (either on a post-it note or piece of paper that I can collect in ☺)

1. One thing you learnt from today's session?
2. One way in which the study could be extended. Has it left you wanting to know more?
3. One piece of advice you might give to another education professional if they are supporting a student who has a different cultural identity to the culture they are learning in?

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Appendix 10: Anonymous responses from the conference workshop

Anonymous post-it note feedback collected on my

'When East Meets West' __ Conference 2019 – Parallel Session 2

Thursday 30th May 2019

1. One thing you have learnt from today's session?

- ✓ *Intersectionality is cross-cultural and it is the researcher / interviewer's use of data (especially qualitative) that can categorise or link into themes.*
- ✓ *How motivated postgraduate students are and how many of them have to work within their cultural or family values, which can often be constructive.*
- ✓ *I now understand different cultures and accept that there are different ways of learning.*
- ✓ *I enjoyed the opportunity for lots of conversation with other participants.*
- ✓ *I learnt the concept of kiasu and anecdotal insights.*
- ✓ *Students, no matter their cultural background were driven by their intrinsic / extrinsic motivations.*
- ✓ *To be more mindful of how to successfully support international students / students with different cultural backgrounds.*
- ✓ *Something learned – that cultures need to be understood.*
- ✓ *Quotes can be interpreted in different ways and depend on context.*
- ✓ *Great to hear the quotes from students and how they view our education style.*

2. One way in which the study could be extended – has it left you wanting you know more?

- ✓ *Maybe the participants could be followed up in 1-2 years to discover if their outlooks have changes as their presence increases in another cultural setting.*
- ✓ *I think doctoral students could be included to extend this type of research.*
- ✓ *What methods of study work well for most?*
- ✓ *Yes – I'd like to know how you will drawn conclusions without generalising or stereotyping. Educators might like to know how to work with your findings with 100s of students. It is difficult to give 1:1 support.*
- ✓ *I would be interested to know if the student's chosen subject had any impact – if there's any relationship between that and their cultural 'baggage'.*
- ✓ *Broader sample. Quotes from same individuals. Explore beyond East Asian.*
- ✓ *YES IT DID! I reckon maybe trying to diversify the students? (not just Chinese).*
- ✓ *It left me wanting to know more about how to support students going through a cultural bump without opposing their cultural values.*
- ✓ *What are the recommendations for educational institutions?*
- ✓ *It might be interesting to compare different attitudes to life stories.*
- ✓ *Maybe a longitudinal design? Before and after the degree?*

3. One piece of advice you might give to another educational professional if they are supporting a student who has a different cultural identity to the culture they are learning in.

- ✓ *You are responsible for gathering information and being open to others' expertise regardless of how much you discover – it is still an acquired culture different to yours.*
- ✓ *Listen, listen, listen.*
- ✓ *Learn about the culture.*
- ✓ *Ask the student what they like about learning / the subject and how they like to learn. Not presuming you know and don't force your preferred methods.*
- ✓ *If you are able to, find out something about your students' cultural identities in advance. If not or as well, just ask them! E.g. an icebreaker activity.*
- ✓ *It would be useful to know about social context.*
- ✓ *Be mindful of pop-cultures references in teaching.*
- ✓ *To have 1:1s with them. To establish a connection with them and to discover more about motivations.*
- ✓ *Listen to the student. Try to hear why they are studying and how their journey is affecting them.*
- ✓ *Embrace differences. Challenge 'negative' cultural bumps and embrace positive ones and support them through changing values.*
- ✓ *Check up on the student and ask them if they extra support and or want their assignments in a different style.*